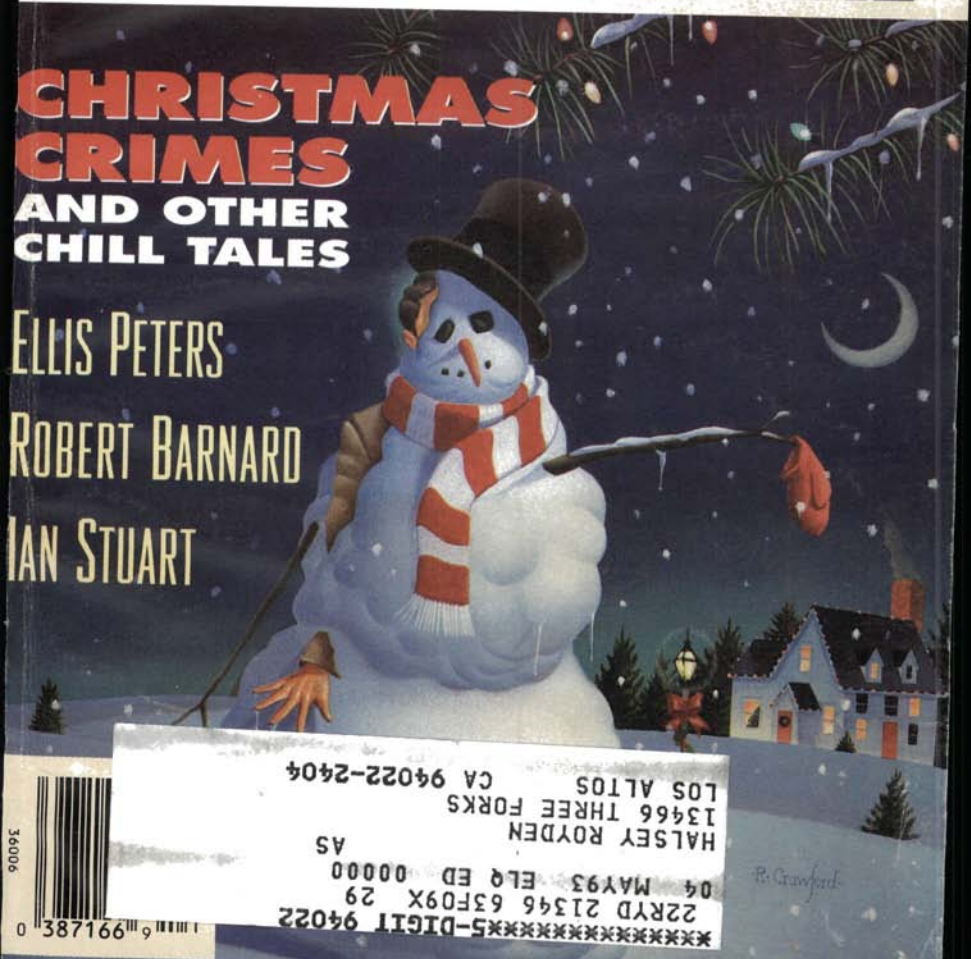
MID-DECEMBER 1992

$2.25 U.S. / $2.95 CAN.

ELLERY QUEEN®

THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE



CHRISTMAS CRIMES
AND OTHER CHILL TALES

ELLIS PETERS

ROBERT BARNARD

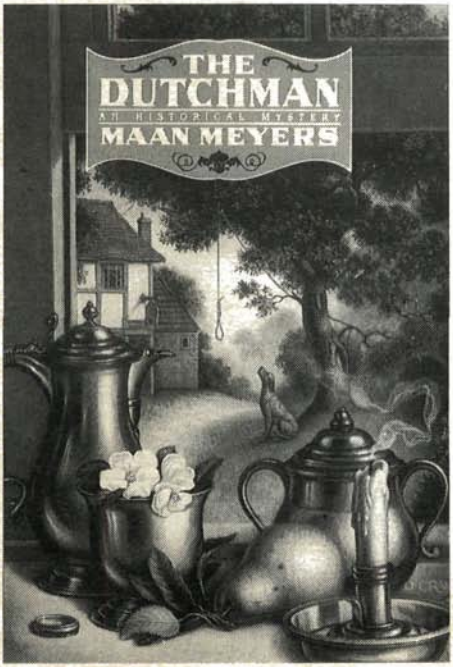
IAN STUART

HALSEY ROYDEN
13466 THREE FORKS
LOS ALTOS CA 94022-2404

**********5-DIGIT 94022
22RYD 21346 63F09X 29
04 MAY93 ELQ ED 00000

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

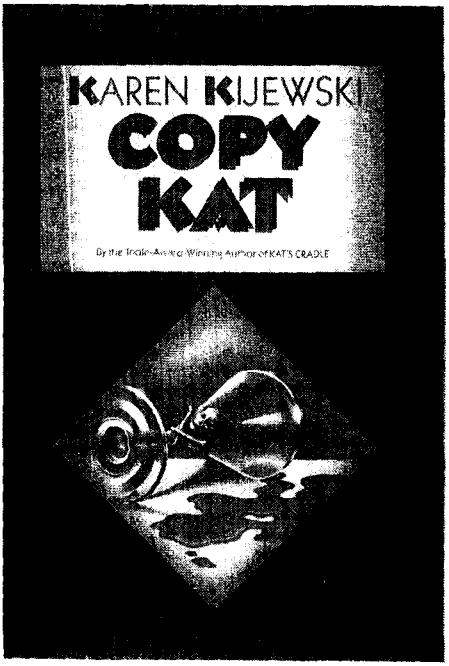
Even when it was called New Amsterdam, Manhattan was murder.



The year is 1664, and city life is perilous—especially for Schout (Sheriff) Tonneman. But he won't be stopped, even when terror grips the fledgling settlement already threatened by British invasion. Rich with historical detail, this fascinating colonial mystery is the first in a new series recounting the intrigues of succeeding generations of the Tonneman family.

PERFECT CRIME
America's most wanted list.
LICENSED TO UNCLE.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The drinks came neat— the murder was anything but.



By the time Kat Colorado goes undercover as a bartender in a California resort town to investigate the murder of a young woman, the cops have already called it quits. And the more drinks Kat slides across the local bar, the harder it is to tell truth from fiction.

"A strong contender for best mystery of the year... This is Kijewski's breakout book, lifting her...right up there with that other smartmouthed-p.i. specialist, Sue Grafton." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Also new from PERFECT CRIME:

BLOODY INSTRUCTIONS, BY **SIMON SHAW** • **TO DO NO HARM,** BY **LESLIE GLASS**
BLOODLINES, BY **SUSAN CONANT** • **HOTEL MORGUE,** BY **JANET LAURENCE**

Available wherever books are sold

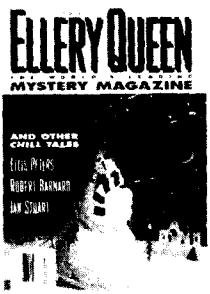
Doubleday

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

ELLERY QUEEN
THE WORLD'S LEADING
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

The Trinity Cat	Ellis Peters	4
Deadly Wednesday	Donald Olson	20
The Theft of Santa's Beard	Edward D. Hoch	30
Teeny Ann	Barbara Owens	47
Drummond Street	Christine Green	55
The Jury Box	Jon L. Breen	66
The Xerox in the Lost Room	Robertson Davies	71
EQMM Readers Award		83
Topaz	Terry Mullins	85
Ruby Laughter, Tears of Pearl	James Powell	98
The Secret	Florence V. Mayberry	108
A Hotel in Bucharest	Robert Barnard	124
Miss Crindle and the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Ian Stuart	139
Index to Volumes 99 and 100		155



Cover Illustration by Bob Crawford

Dell Magazines, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10168-0035
Note: indicia on page 156

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For the first time ever you can own a complete library of Stephen King blood-curdling best sellers in their original hardcover editions.

All roads lead to terror in Stephen King's horrifying new novel. It's the unputdownable story of an outwardly proper couple, their lonely New England cottage, and a deadly game of love played late one autumn afternoon.

Examine King's *Gerald's Game* for 10 days as your introduction to the Library. If you keep it, we'll bill you just $7.95 (plus shipping and handling). That's more than 50% off the publisher's price.

After that you'll receive King's other tomes of horror—one about every 7 weeks. And as a member, you'll get King's latest hardcovers as soon as they're published! Keep only the ones you want and we'll bill you just $14.95 (plus shipping and handling). There's no obligation to buy and you can cancel at any time. You can't scare up a better deal than that.

The Stephen King Library features:

- **Quality hardcover editions**
- **Complete, original text**
- **Shockingly low prices for members only**
- **Durably bound, acid-free paper**
- **A special "Welcome to the Library" letter from King himself**

Presenting The

STEPHEN KING LIBRARY

Get your first volume in this thrilling collection of nightmares for the shockingly low introductory price of only $7.95

THE STEPHEN KING LIBRARY

Camp Hill, PA 17012-0001

YES, send me as my introduction to the Stephen King Library, *Gerald's Game,* for my no-risk 10-day FREE examination. If I keep it, I pay only $7.95, plus shipping and handling. I understand that future books in the series will arrive approximately every 7 weeks, and may be reviewed for 10 days with no obligation to buy. I will be billed a low $14.95, plus shipping and handling, for each subsequent book I keep and I may cancel at any time. If I return the first book, *Gerald's Game,* my subscription will be cancelled automatically, and I'll be under no further obligation.

SK272-12-2

Name _____
(Please print clearly)

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send no money now. All orders subject to approval. Prices subject to change. **2-F9**

The Stephen King Library is a division of Book-of-the-Month-Club, Inc. © 1992 BOMC

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a distinguished Christmas story by

ELLIS PETERS

The Medieval mysteries featuring Brother Cadfael have earned Ellis Peters a fan club in the United States (The Ellis Peters Appreciation Society) and a loyal following in Britain, but she has also produced a wide range of contemporary short stories and books. As part of our Christmas celebration, we are pleased to present one of the author's non-historical mystery stories. In "The Trinity Cat" the holiday spirit of an English village is dampened by a senseless murder until an unexpected friend of the victim helps bring the murderer to justice . . .

THE TRINITY CAT

by ELLIS PETERS

He was sitting on top of one of the rear gate posts of the churchyard when I walked through on Christmas Eve, grooming in his lordly style, with one back leg wrapped round his neck, and his bitten ear at an angle of forty-five degrees, as usual. I reckon one of the toms he'd tangled with in his nomad days had ripped the starched bit out of that one, the other stood up sharply enough. There was snow on the ground, a thin veiling, just beginning to crackle in promise of frost before evening, but he had at least three warm refuges around the place whenever he felt like holing up, besides his two houses, which he used only for visiting and cadging. He'd been a known character around our village for three years then, ever since he walked in from nowhere and made himself agreeable to the vicar and the verger, and finding the billet comfortable and the pickings good, constituted himself resident cat to Holy Trinity Church, and took over all the jobs around the place that humans

Copyright © 1976 by Ellis Peters. First published in Winter's Crimes 8, *Macmillan. Reprinted by permission of Deborah Owen Literary Agency.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were too slow to tackle, like rat-catching, and chasing off invading dogs.

Nobody knows how old he is, but I think he could only have been about two when he settled here, a scrawny, chewed-up black bandit as lean as wire. After three years of being fed by Joel Woodward at Trinity Cottage, which was the verger's house by tradition and flanked the lynch gate on one side, and pampered and petted by Miss Patience Thomson at Church Cottage on the other side, he was double his old size and sleek as velvet, but still had one lop ear and a kink two inches from the end of his tail. He still looked like a brigand, but a highly prosperous brigand. Nobody ever gave him a name, he wasn't the sort to get called anything fluffy or familiar. Only Miss Patience ever dared coo at him, and he was very gracious about that, she being elderly and innocent and very free with little perks like raw liver, on which he doted. One way and another, he had it made. He lived mostly outdoors, never staying in either house overnight. In winter he had his own little ground-level hatch into the furnace room of the church, sharing his lodgings matily with a hedgehog that had qualified as assistant vermin destructor around the churchyard and preferred sitting out the winter among the coke to hibernating like common hedgehogs. These individualists keep turning up in our valley, for some reason.

All I'd gone to the church for that afternoon was to fix up with the vicar about the Christmas peal, having been roped into the bell-ringing team. Resident police in remote areas like ours get dragged into all sorts of activities, and when the area's changing, and new problems are cropping up, if they have any sense they don't need too much dragging, but go willingly. I've put my finger on many an astonished yobbo who thought he'd got clean away with his little breaking-and-entering, just by keeping my ears open during a darts match or choir practice.

When I came back through the churchyard, around half past two, Miss Patience was just coming out of her gate, with a shopping bag on her wrist, and heading towards the street, and we walked along together a bit of the way. She was getting on for seventy, and hardly bigger than a bird, but very independent. Never having married or left the valley, and having looked after a mother who lived to be nearly ninety, she'd never had time to catch up with new ideas in the style of dress suitable for elderly ladies. Everything had always been done mother's way, and fashion, music, and morals had stuck at the period when mother was a carefully brought up girl learning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

domestic skills and preparing for a chaste marriage. There's a lot to be said for it! But it had turned Miss Patience into a frail little lady in long-skirted black or grey or navy blue, who still felt undressed without hat and gloves, at an age when Mrs. Newcombe, for instance, up at the pub, favoured shocking-pink trouser suits and red-gold hairpieces. A pretty little old lady Miss Patience was, though, very straight and neat. It was a pleasure to watch her walk. Which is more than I could say for Mrs. Newcombe in her trouser suit, especially from the back!

"A happy Christmas, Sergeant Moon!" she chirped at me on sight. And I wished her the same, and slowed up to her pace.

"It's going to be slippery by twilight," I said. "You be careful how you go."

"Oh, I'm only going to be an hour or so," she said serenely. "I shall be home long before the frost sets in. I'm only doing the last bit of Christmas shopping. There's a cardigan I have to collect for Mrs. Downs." That was her cleaning lady, who came in three mornings a week. "I ordered it long ago, but deliveries are so slow nowadays. They've promised it for today. And a recording for my little errand boy." Tommy Fowler that was, one of the church trebles, as pink and wholesome-looking as they usually contrive to be, and just as artful. "And one mustn't forget our dumb friends, either, must one?" said Miss Patience cheerfully. "They're all important, too."

I took this to mean a couple of packets of some new product to lure wild birds to her garden. The Church Cottage thrushes were so fat they could hardly fly, and when it was frosty she put out fresh water three and four times a day.

We came to our brief street of shops, and off she went, with her big jet-and-gold brooch gleaming in her scarf. She had quite a few pieces of Victorian and Edwardian jewellery her mother'd left behind, and almost always wore one piece, being used to the belief that a lady dresses meticulously every day, not just on Sundays. I went for a brisk walk round to see what was going on, and then went home to Molly and high tea, and took my boots off thankfully.

That was Christmas Eve. Christmas Day little Miss Thomson didn't turn up for eight o'clock Communion, which was unheard-of. The vicar said he'd call in after service, for in our village it's the custom for the choir to go and sing the vicar an aubade in the shape of "Christians, Awake!" before the main service, ignoring the fact that he's been up four hours, and conducted two Communions. And Tommy Fowler had a solo in the anthem, too. It was a quarter past

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twelve when Tommy got away and shot up the garden path to the door of Church Cottage.

He shot back even faster a minute later. I was heading for home when he came rocketing out of the gate and ran slam into me, with his eyes sticking out on stalks and his mouth wide open, making a sort of muted keening sound with shock. He clutched hold of me and pointed back towards Miss Thomson's front door, left half open when he fled, and tried three times before he could croak out:

"Miss Patience. . . . She's there on the floor—she's bad!"

I went in on the run, thinking she'd had a heart attack all alone there, and was lying helpless. The front door led through a diminutive hall, and through another glazed door into the living room, and that door was open, too, and there was Miss Patience face-down on the carpet, still in her coat and gloves, and with her shopping bag lying beside her. An occasional table had been knocked over in her fall, spilling a vase and a book. Her hat was askew over one ear, and caved in like a trodden mushroom, and her neat grey bun of hair had come undone and trailed on her shoulder, and it was no longer grey but soiled, brownish black. She was dead and stiff. The room was so cold, you could tell those doors had been ajar all night.

The kid followed me in, hanging onto my sleeve, his teeth chattering. "I didn't open the door—it was open! I didn't touch her, or anything. I only came to see if she was all right, and get my record."

It was there, lying unbroken, half out of the shopping bag by her arm. She'd meant it for him, and I told him he should have it, but not yet, because it might be evidence, and we mustn't move anything. And I got him out of there quick, and gave him to the vicar to cope with, and went back to Miss Patience as soon as I'd telephoned for the outfit. Because we had a murder on our hands.

So that was the end of one gentle, harmless old woman, one of very many these days, battered to death because she walked in on an intruder who panicked. Walked in on him, I judged, not much more than an hour after I left her in the street. Everything about her looked the same as then, the shopping bag, the coat, the hat, the gloves. The only difference, that she was dead. No, one more thing! No handbag, unless it was under the body, and later, when we were able to move her, I wasn't surprised to see that it wasn't there. Handbags are where old ladies carry their money. The sneak-thief who panicked and lashed out at her still had greed and presence of mind enough to grab the bag as he fled. Nobody'd have to describe that bag to me, I knew it well, soft black leather with an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

old-fashioned gilt clasp and a short handle, a small thing, not like the holdalls they carry nowadays.

She was lying facing the opposite door, also open, which led to the stairs. On the writing desk by that door stood one of a pair of heavy brass candlesticks. Its fellow was on the floor beside Miss Thomson's body, and though the bun of hair and the felt hat had prevented any great spattering of blood, there was blood enough on the square base to label the weapon. Whoever had hit her had been just sneaking down the stairs, ready to leave. She'd come home barely five minutes too soon.

Upstairs, in her bedroom, her bits of jewellery hadn't taken much finding. She'd never thought of herself as having valuables, or of other people as coveting them. Her gold and turquoise and funereal jet and true-lover's-knots in gold and opals, and mother's engagement and wedding rings, and her little Edwardian pendant watch set with seed pearls, had simply lived in the small top drawer of her dressing table. She belonged to an honest epoch, and it was gone, and now she was gone after it. She didn't even lock her door when she went shopping. There wouldn't have been so much as the warning of a key grating in the lock, just the door opening.

Ten years ago not a soul in this valley behaved differently from Miss Patience. Nobody locked doors, sometimes not even overnight. Some of us went on a fortnight's holiday and left the doors unlocked. Now we can't even put out the milk money until the milkman knocks at the door in person. If this generation likes to pride itself on its progress, let it! As for me, I thought suddenly that maybe the innocent was well out of it.

We did the usual things, photographed the body and the scene of the crime, the doctor examined her and authorised her removal, and confirmed what I'd supposed about the approximate time of her death. And the forensic boys lifted a lot of smudgy latents that weren't going to be of any use to anybody, because they weren't going to be on record, barring a million to one chance. The whole thing stank of the amateur. There wouldn't be any easy matching up of prints, even if they got beauties. One more thing we did for Miss Patience. We tolled the dead-bell for her on Christmas night, six heavy, muffled strokes. She was a virgin. Nobody had to vouch for it, we all knew. And let me point out, it is a title of honour, to be respected accordingly.

We'd hardly got the poor soul out of the house when the Trinity cat strolled in, taking advantage of the minute or two while the door

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was open. He got as far as the place on the carpet where she'd lain, and his fur and whiskers stood on end, and even his lop ear jerked up straight. He put his nose down to the pile of the Wilton, about where her shopping bag and handbag must have lain, and started going round in interested circles, snuffing the floor and making little throaty noises that might have been distress, but sounded like pleasure. Excitement, anyhow. The chaps from the C.I.D. were still busy, and didn't want him under their feet, so I picked him up and took him with me when I went across to Trinity Cottage to talk to the verger. The cat never liked being picked up; after a minute he started clawing and cursing, and I put him down. He stalked away again at once, past the corner where people shot their dead flowers, out at the lynch gate, and straight back to sit on Miss Thomson's doorstep. Well, after all, he used to get fed there, he might well be uneasy at all these queer comings and goings. And they don't say "as curious as a cat" for nothing, either.

I didn't need telling that Joel Woodward had had no hand in what had happened, he'd been nearest neighbour and good friend to Miss Patience for years, but he might have seen or heard something out of the ordinary. He was a little, wiry fellow, gnarled like a tree root, the kind that goes on spry and active into his nineties, and then decides that's enough, and leaves overnight. His wife was dead long ago, and his daughter had come back to keep house for him after her husband deserted her, until she died, too, in a bus accident. There was just old Joel now, and the grandson she'd left with him, young Joel Barnett, nineteen—a bit of a tearaway by his grandad's standards, but so far pretty innocuous by mine. He was a sulky, graceless sort, but he did work, and he stuck with the old man when many another would have lit out elsewhere.

"A bad business," said old Joel, shaking his head. "I only wish I could help you lay hands on whoever did it. But I only saw her yesterday morning about ten, when she took in the milk. I was round at the church hall all afternoon, getting things ready for the youth social they had last night. It was dark before I got back. I never saw or heard anything out of place. You can't see her living room light from here, so there was no call to wonder. But the lad was here all afternoon. They only work till one, Christmas Eve. Then they all went boozing together for an hour or so, I expect, so I don't know exactly what time he got in, but he was here and had the tea on when I came home. Drop round in an hour or so and he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

should be here, he's gone round to collect this girl he's mashing. There's a party somewhere tonight."

I dropped round accordingly, and young Joel was there, sure enough, shoulder-length hair, loud shirt and all, got up to kill, all for the benefit of the girl his grandad had mentioned. And it turned out to be Connie Dymond, from the comparatively respectable branch of the family, along the canal side. There were three sets of Dymond cousins, boys, no great harm in 'em but worth watching, but only this one girl in Connie's family. A good-looker, or at least most of the lads seemed to think so. She had a dozen or so on her string before she took up with young Joel. Big girl, too, with a lot of eyeshadow and a bright red mouth, in a fashionable short skirt. But she was acting very prim and proper with old Joel around.

"Half-past two when I got home," said young Joel. "Grandad was round at the hall, and I'd have gone round to help him, only I'd had a pint or two, and after I'd had me dinner I went to sleep, so it wasn't worth it by the time I woke up. Around four, that'd be. From then on I was here watching the telly, and I never saw nor heard a thing. But there was nobody else here, so I could be spinning you the yarn, if you want to look at it that way."

He had a way of going looking for trouble before anybody else suggested it, there was nothing new about that. Still, there it was. One young fellow on the spot, and minus any alibi. There'd be plenty of others in the same case.

In the evening he'd been at the church social. Miss Patience wouldn't be expected there, it was mainly for the young, and anyhow, she very seldom went out in the evenings.

"*I* was there with Joel," said Connie Dymond. "He called for me at seven, I was with him all evening. We went home to our place after the social finished, and he didn't leave till nearly midnight."

Very firm about it she was, doing her best for him. She could hardly know that his movements in the evening didn't interest us, since Miss Patience had then been dead for some hours.

When I opened the door to leave, the Trinity cat walked in, stalking past me with a purposeful stride. He had a look round us all, and then made for the girl, reached up, his front paws to her knees, and was on her lap before she could fend him off, though she didn't look as if she welcomed his attentions. Very civil he was, purring and rubbing himself against her coat sleeve, and poking his whiskery face into hers. Unusual for him to be effusive, but when he did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decide on it, it was always with someone who couldn't stand cats. You'll have noticed it's a way they have.

"Shove him off," said young Joel, seeing she didn't at all care for being singled out. "He only does it to annoy people."

And she did, but he only jumped on again, I noticed as I closed the door on them and left.

It was a Dymond party they were going to, the senior lot, up at the filling station. Not much point in trying to check up on all her cousins and swains when they were gathered for a booze-up. Coming out of a hangover, tomorrow, they might be easy meat. Not that I had any special reason to look their way, they were an extrovert lot, more given to grievous bodily harm in street punch-ups than anything secretive. But it was wide open.

Well, we summed up. None of the lifted prints was on record, all we could do in that line was exclude all those that were Miss Thomson's. This kind of sordid little opportunist break-in had come into local experience only fairly recently, and though it was no novelty now, it had never before led to a death. No motive but the impulse of greed, so no traces leading up to the act, and none leading away. Everyone connected with the church, and most of the village besides, knew about the bits of jewellery she had, but never before had anyone considered them as desirable loot. Victoriana now carry inflated values, and are in demand, but this still didn't look calculated, just wanton. A kid's crime, a teenager's crime. Or the crime of a permanent teenager. They start at twelve years old now, but there are also the shiftless louts who never get beyond twelve years old, even in their forties.

We checked all the obvious people, her part-time gardener—but he was demonstrably elsewhere at the time—and his drifter of a son, whose alibi was non-existent but voluble, the window-cleaner, a sidelong soul who played up his ailments and did rather well out of her, all the delivery men. Several there who were clear, one or two who could have been around, but had no particular reason to be. Then we went after all the youngsters who, on their records, were possibles. There were three with breaking-and-entering convictions, but if they'd been there they'd been gloved. Several others with petty theft against them were also without alibis. By the end of a pretty exhaustive survey the field was wide, and none of the runners seemed to be ahead of the rest, and we were still looking. None of the stolen property had so far showed up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not, that is, until the Saturday. I was coming from Church Cottage through the graveyard again, and as I came near the corner where the dead flowers were shot, I noticed a glaring black patch making an irregular hole in the veil of frozen snow that still covered the ground. You couldn't miss it, it showed up like a black eye. And part of it was the soil and rotting leaves showing through, and part, the blackest part, was the Trinity cat, head down and back arched, digging industriously like a terrier after a rat. The bent and of his tail lashed steadily, while the remaining eight inches stood erect. If he knew I was standing watching him, he didn't care. Nothing was going to deflect him from what he was doing. And in a minute or two he heaved his prize clear, and clawed out to the light a little black leather handbag with a gilt clasp. No mistaking it, all stuck over as it was with dirt and rotting leaves. And he loved it, he was patting it and playing with it and rubbing his head against it, and purring like a steam engine. He cursed, though, when I took it off him, and walked round and round me, pawing and swearing, telling me and the world he'd found it, and it was his.

It hadn't been there long. I'd been along that path often enough to know that the snow hadn't been disturbed the day before. Also, the mess of humus fell off it pretty quick and clean, and left it hardly stained at all. I held it in my handkerchief and snapped the catch, and the inside was clean and empty, the lining slightly frayed from long use. The Trinity cat stood upright on his hind legs and protested loudly, and he had a voice that could outshout a Siamese.

Somebody behind me said curiously: "Whatever've you got there?" And there was young Joel standing open-mouthed, staring, with Connie Dymond hanging on to his arm and gaping at the cat's find in horrified recognition.

"Oh, no! My gawd, that's Miss Thomson's bag, isn't it? I've seen her carrying it hundreds of times."

"Did *he* dig it up?" said Joel, incredulous. "You reckon the chap who—you know, *him!*—he buried it there? It could be anybody, everybody uses this way through."

"My gawd!" said Connie, shrinking in fascinated horror against his side. "Look at that cat! You'd think he *knows*. . . . He gives me the shivers! What's got into him?"

What, indeed? After I'd got rid of them and taken the bag away with me I was still wondering. I walked away with his prize and he followed me as far as the road, howling and swearing, and once I put the bag down, open, to see what he'd do, and he pounced on it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and started his fun and games again until I took it from him. For the life of me I couldn't see what there was about it to delight him, but he was in no doubt. I was beginning to feel right superstitious about this avenging detective cat, and to wonder what he was going to unearth next.

I know I ought to have delivered the bag to the forensic lab, but somehow I hung on to it overnight. There was something fermenting at the back of my mind that I couldn't yet grasp.

Next morning we had two more at morning service besides the regulars. Young Joel hardly ever went to church, and I doubt if anybody'd ever seen Connie Dymond there before, but there they both were, large as life and solemn as death, in a middle pew, the boy sulky and scowling as if he'd been press-ganged into it, as he certainly had, Connie very subdued and big-eyed, with almost no makeup and an unusually grave and thoughtful face. Sudden death brings people up against daunting possibilities, and creates penitents. Young Joel felt silly there, but he was daft about her, plainly enough. She could get him to do what she wanted, and she'd wanted to make this gesture. She went through all the movements of devotion, he just sat, stood, and kneeled awkwardly as required, and went on scowling.

There was a bitter east wind when we came out. On the steps of the porch everybody dug out gloves and turned up collars against it, and so did young Joel, and as he hauled his gloves out of his coat pocket, out with them came a little bright thing that rolled down the steps in front of us all and came to rest in a crack between the flagstones of the path. A gleam of pale blue and gold. A dozen people must have recognised it. Mrs. Downs gave tongue in a shriek that informed even those who hadn't.

"That's Miss Thomson's! It's one of her turquoise earrings! *How did you get hold of that, Joel Barnett?*"

How, indeed? Everybody stood staring at the tiny thing, and then at young Joel, and he was gazing at the flagstones, struck white and dumb. And all in a moment Connie Dymond had pulled her arm free of his and recoiled from him until her back was against the wall, and was edging away from him like somebody trying to get out of range of flood or fire, and her face a sight to be seen, blind and stiff with horror.

"You!" she said in a whisper. "It was you! Oh, my God, *you* did it—*you* killed her! And me keeping company—how could I? How could *you!*"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She let out a screech and burst into sobs, and before anybody could stop her she turned and took to her heels, running for home like a mad thing.

I let her go. She'd keep. And I got young Joel and that single earring away from the Sunday congregation and into Trinity Cottage before half the people there knew what was happening, and shut the world out, all but old Joel, who came panting and shaking after us a few minutes later.

The boy was a long time getting his voice back, and when he did he had nothing to say but, hopelessly, over and over: "I didn't! I never touched her, I wouldn't. I don't know how that thing got into my pocket. I didn't do it. I never . . ."

Human beings are not all that inventive. Given a similar set of circumstances they tend to come out with the same formula. And in any case, "deny everything and say nothing else" is a very good rule when cornered.

They thought I'd gone round the bend when I said: "Where's the cat? See if you can get him in."

Old Joel was past wondering. He went out and rattled a saucer on the steps, and pretty soon the Trinity cat strolled in. Not at all excited, not wanting anything, fed and lazy, just curious enough to come and see why he was wanted. I turned him loose on young Joel's overcoat, and he couldn't have cared less. The pocket that had held the earring held very little interest for him. He didn't care about any of the clothes in the wardrobe, or on the pegs in the little hall. As far as he was concerned, this new find was a nonevent.

I sent for a constable and a car, and took young Joel in with me to the station, and all the village, you may be sure, either saw us pass or heard about it very shortly after. But I didn't stop to take any statement from him, just left him there, and took the car up to Mary Melton's place, where she breeds Siamese, and borrowed a cat basket from her, the sort she uses to carry her queens to the vet. She asked what on earth I wanted it for, and I said to take the Trinity cat for a ride. She laughed her head off.

"Well, *he's* no queen," she said, "and no king, either. Not even a jack! And you'll never get that wild thing into a basket."

"Oh, yes, I will," I said. "And if he isn't any of the other picture cards, he's probably going to turn out to be the joker."

A very neat basket it was, not too obviously meant for a cat. And it was no trick getting the Trinity cat into it, all I did was drop in Miss Thomson's handbag, and he was in after it in a moment. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

growled when he found himself shut in, but it was too late to complain then.

At the house by the canal Connie Dymond's mother let me in, but was none too happy about letting me see Connie, until I explained that I needed a statement from her before I could fit together young Joel's movements all through those Christmas days. Naturally I understood that the girl was terribly upset, but she'd had a lucky escape, and the sooner everything was cleared up, the better for her. And it wouldn't take long.

It didn't take long. Connie came down the stairs readily enough when her mother called her. She was all stained and pale and tearful, but had perked up somewhat with a sort of shivering pride in her own prominence. I've seen them like that before, getting the juice out of being the centre of attention even while they wish they were elsewhere. You could even say she hurried down, and she left the door of her bedroom open behind her, by the light coming through at the head of the stairs.

"Oh, Sergeant Moon!" she quavered at me from three steps up. "Isn't it *awful?* I still can't believe it! *Can* there be some mistake? Is there any chance it *wasn't* . . . ?"

I said soothingly, yes, there was always a chance. And I slipped the latch of the cat basket with one hand, so that the flap fell open, and the Trinity cat was out of there and up those stairs like a black flash, startling her so much she nearly fell down the last step, and steadied herself against the wall with a small shriek. I blurted apologies for accidentally loosing him, and went up the stairs three at a time ahead of her, before she could recover her balance.

He was up on his hind legs in her showy little room, full of pop posters and frills and garish colours, pawing at the second drawer of her dressing table, and singing a loud, joyous, impatient song. When I came plunging in, he even looked over his shoulder at me and stood down, as though he knew I'd open the drawer for him. And I did, and he was up among her fancy undies like a shot, and digging with his front paws.

He found what he wanted just as she came in the door. He yanked it out from among her bras and slips, and tossed it into the air, and in seconds he was on the floor with it, rolling and wrestling it, juggling it on his four paws like a circus turn, and purring fit to kill, a cat in ecstasy. A comic little thing it was, a muslin mouse with a plaited green nylon string for a tail, yellow beads for eyes, and nylon threads for whiskers, that rustled and sent out wafts of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strong scent as he batted it around and sang to it. A catmint mouse, old Miss Thomson's last-minute purchase from the pet shop for her dumb friend. If you could ever call the Trinity cat dumb! The only thing she bought that day small enough to be slipped into her handbag instead of the shopping bag.

Connie let out a screech, and was across that room so fast I only just beat her to the open drawer. They were all there, the little pendant watch, the locket, the brooches, the true-lover's-knot, the purse, even the other earring. A mistake, she should have ditched both while she was about it, but she was too greedy. They were for pierced ears, anyhow, no good to Connie.

I held them out in the palm of my hand—such a large haul they made—and let her see what she'd robbed and killed for.

If she'd kept her head she might have made a fight of it even then, claimed he'd made her hide them for him, and she'd been afraid to tell on him directly, and could only think of staging that public act at church to get him safely in custody before she came clean. But she went wild. She did the one deadly thing, turned and kicked out in a screaming fury at the Trinity cat. He was spinning like a humming top, and all she touched was the kink in his tail. He whipped round and clawed a red streak down her leg through the nylon. And then she screamed again, and began to babble through hysterical sobs that she never meant to hurt the poor old sod, that it wasn't her fault! Ever since she'd been going with young Joel she'd been seeing that little old bag going in and out, draped with her bits of gold. What in hell did an old witch like her want with jewellery? She had no *right!* At her age!

"But I never meant to hurt her! She came in too soon," lamented Connie, still and forever the aggrieved. "What was I supposed to do? I had to get away, didn't I? *She was between me and the door!*"

She was half her size, too, and nearly four times her age! Ah, well! What the courts would do with Connie, thank God, was none of my business. I just took her in and charged her, and got her statement. Once we had her dabs it was all over, because she'd left a bunch of them sweaty and clear on that brass candlestick. But if it hadn't been for the Trinity cat and his single-minded pursuit, scaring her into that ill-judged attempt to hand us young Joel as a scapegoat, she might, she just might, have got clean away with it. At least the boy could go home now, and count his blessings.

Not that she was very bright, of course. Who but a stupid harpy, soaked in cheap perfume and gimcrack dreams, would have hung

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on even to the catmint mouse, mistaking it for a herbal sachet to put among her underclothes?

I saw the Trinity cat only this morning, sitting grooming on the church porch. He's getting very self-important, as if he knows he's a celebrity, though throughout he was only looking after the interests of Number One, like all cats. He's lost interest in his mouse already, now most of the scent's gone.

DETECTIVERSE

POWERED SUGAR

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

She kicked up her heels when she heard he had died,
That smooth-talking con man who'd made her his bride,
Then shortly thereafter by cunning and stealth
Had suddenly vanished with much of her wealth.
The P.I. she hired to track the bum down
Located him in a large eastern town.
She sent him a gift—Fanny Farmer's confection,
Soft centers and nuts, his most-cherished selection.
And confident that such a self-assured dandy
Would plop down at once and consume all that candy,
She had poisoned the chocolates to punish the cheat,
Steadfastly believing, "Revenge is so sweet."

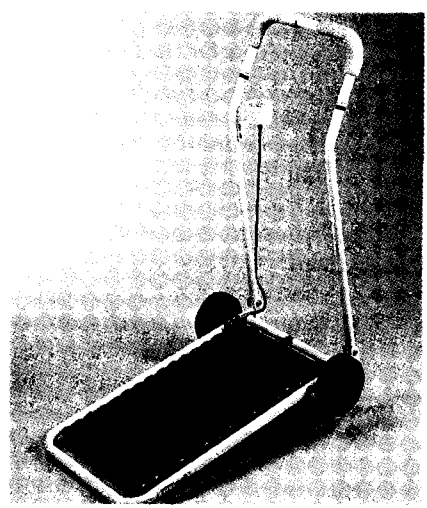
© 1992 by William F. Smith.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **$129.98** ($7.00) #A1933.

▼ FOLDAWAY EXERTRACK™



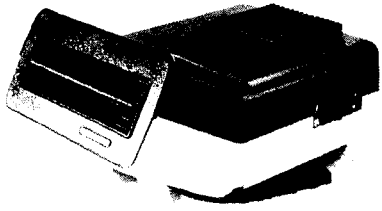
Staying in shape is vital for our health and well being with today's lifestyle. Getting to the gym may not always be easy in our busy lives. We have just the answer for all you people on the go or just for the ones who enjoy to get fit at home. That's why the Foldaway Exertrack is the perfect way to exercise. This personal treadmill has a speedometer/odometer to monitor speed and progress. It measures 38"x21"x3" and features a safe rubber track and an adjustable handlebar that faces forward or backward for running and walking comfort. No electrical connections or motors needed. Exercise has never been simpler. Order one today and get on the right track with the Exertrack. Folds away for easy storage, lightweight and compact. At a great price! **$131.98** ($15.00) #A1977.

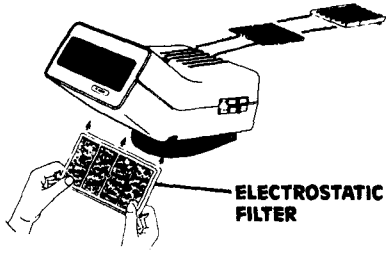
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MAIL ORDER MALL

BREATHE EASIER WITH THE AIR PROCESSOR

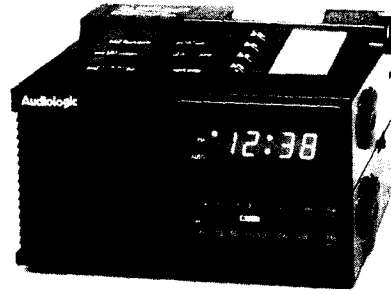
Clean air is vital to overall good health and general well-being and there is growing concern about the quality of the air around us. Amcor's Air Processor is uniquely designed to remove indoor air pollution and improve air quality. This compact unit has a high voltage generator that produces negatively charged ions that clean the air of cigarette/cigar smoke, dust, pollen, fungal and bacterial particles as well as a host of other allergy stimuli. The Air Processor also features a blower for air circulation and a unique filter that is permanent and washable. Includes a free Ionoscope that detects the negative ions emitted from the ion generator and proves that it is functioning. Very quiet so it is perfect for any room in your house. UL listed. **$99.98** ($6.50) #A2002.





★ ★ ★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ ★

SLEEP SOUNDLY WITH SOUND SLEEPER



Is noise pollution interfering with your ability to get a good night's sleep? If so, then the Sound Sleeper by Audiologic is the clock radio of your dreams. Sound Sleeper combines a state of the art AM/FM cassette clock radio with the benefits of natural sound conditioning. Sound Sleeper lets you fall asleep to the sounds of ocean surf, rushing waterfalls and/or rainfall with the flip of a switch. After a relaxing night's sleep, wake up with a buzzer or music from the radio or cassette. So why have an ordinary clock radio when you can have the cassette clock radio that not only wakes you up but also lulls you to sleep! **$89.98** ($5.50) #A2000.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** Dept.132 EL, P.O.Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1991
1905 Swarthmore Ave, Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

DONALD OLSON

Not that Philip was a fool or wholly deluded himself. There were still times during the long afternoon hours when he would chide himself for making so much out of the situation, quite aware that he was doing no more than allowing himself the vicarious enjoyment of someone else's real-life romance, yet with a pleasure far more emotionally vivid than he'd ever derived from the romances of literature. So what's the harm, he'd ask himself. He was hurting no one . . .

DEADLY WEDNESDAY

by DONALD OLSON

When Philip had first proposed the idea one summer afternoon in the historical museum where he worked, its very rashness had excited him; now he felt a faint tremor of misgiving.

As if reading his mind, Tom Barclay smiled. "Second thoughts, old boy?"

Philip colored, replied a bit too hastily. "No! No, indeed. What makes you say that?"

"You needn't worry about the house, you know. You'll never know anyone's been there."

A bachelor, Philip did have some rather nice things in his house and something of a fetish about tidiness. It was not that, however, but a vague discomfort about the morality of what he was doing that caused a flutter of uncertainty. Philip had never done an improper thing in his life, as one might have guessed from the austerely conventional image he projected, the mildness of manner, the fussiness of dress, a certain dry, monkish air of rarely being exposed to the out-of-doors.

© *1992 by Donald Olson.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom Barclay was quite the opposite. Tall, blond, and well built, with an aura of athletic vitality, an exuberant manner, and a frank, ingratiating chumminess, he made it clear he didn't give a fig for the conventions. From the day Tom had wandered into the museum and struck up a conversation, Philip had pegged him as the type to form instant but seldom durable friendships. Yet Philip was nonetheless flattered by Tom's interest and fascinated by the passionate eloquence of his conversation, especially when he talked about the subject clearly of supreme importance in his life: his girlfriend, Angela.

Whatever adventurous or romantic yearnings Philip himself might once have cherished, and perhaps still did in the secret depths of his heart, he'd long since learned to gratify vicariously in the world of books and artifacts. He found Tom's attitude toward life charmingly irresponsible, envied his carefree indifference to the proprieties, and never questioned Tom's motive in nurturing such an unlikely friendship.

It was after several visits from Tom to Philip's house that the older man, somewhat tipsy on the wine his new friend had encouraged him to imbibe, and moved by Tom's seemingly hopeless romantic dilemma, had proposed the "arrangement." Since Tom boarded with an elderly relative in the suburbs and Angela lived with her strict parents, why should they not use Philip's house as a trysting place? Tom had told Philip that Angela refused to meet him in a hotel or any other place where she would feel like a tart.

Now Tom said, "I'll understand if you'd rather call the whole thing off, old boy."

Philip quickly put the other man's mind at rest. "I'm not given to whimsey, Tom. I do want to help and I shall. It won't create the slightest inconvenience for me."

With that he proceeded to repeat his offer: "Every Wednesday I'll leave the house about seven in the evening. I shall not return until after midnight. I've shown you where to find the key. You'll have the house to yourselves. There'll be food and drink in the fridge, clean sheets on the bed. I've no close neighbors so no one will see you. You'll be doing me a favor as well. I've been a stick-in-the-mud too long. It'll do me good to get out in the evening. . . . Have you told Angela about my idea?"

"I didn't dare. Not till I was sure you were serious, Philip. She'll be over the moon. How can I ever thank you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once upon a time Philip might have felt a certain moral repugnance at playing go-between in a sexual liaison; now, however, the unremitting dullness of his life and the wish to convince his friend that he possessed a generous and sophisticated nature weakened whatever puritanical restraint might otherwise have influenced his judgment.

Having proposed the arrangement, however, Philip chose not to admit to himself that it had not been quite the spontaneous inspiration he preferred to believe, but that Tom himself, by subtle hints and gentle, tacit persuasion, had planted the idea in Philip's mind.

Philip had failed to anticipate the warmth of vicarious pleasure he would come to enjoy from this "arrangement." No matter what he did on Wednesday nights—usually a meal in a restaurant and a movie—his thoughts remained excitingly preoccupied with visions of what must be happening at the house.

The first time he returned home on one of these nights he became aware of the lingering scent of a woman's perfume. He moved from room to room, saving the bedroom till last, at first eagerly and then with a mounting sense of disappointment. Tom had kept his promise. Aside from that trace of scent, an empty wine bottle, and a damp towel or two, Philip could detect little evidence of anyone having been there in his absence. In the bedroom he ran his palm across the coverlet as if expecting to feel the warmth of two bodies. Not until he spotted the note in his typewriter did he feel a renewed tingle of excitement.

How very kind you are! You've made me so happy. Angela.

Philip tore the note from the machine and read it over several times with no less joyful agitation than if it had been a love note from his own girlfriend. Then he folded it and tucked it away in his desk.

Next morning he'd opened his eyes with a freshness of vision which regarded each item in the room as if it had acquired a gleaming newness. That deadness of atmosphere in which everything about him had stood as little more than bitter reminders of his own lonely past seemed to have undergone a marvelous transformation.

Bursting into the museum the following afternoon, Tom had seized Philip's hand and pumped it vigorously. "You've saved our lives, Philip. I can't tell you what a lift it gave Angela and me, having hours alone together like that. It was like being in our own home. We made believe it was."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Philip's face lit up; he felt a fullness in his chest. "Did Angela like the flowers?"

"She liked everything. Kept saying how divine it would be if we could have a place just like yours."

And so the arrangement continued. Philip became an even more assiduous housekeeper; he spent hours deciding how he could make his house more appealing to a woman. In the following weeks he bought slipcovers for the old sofa and lounge chair, several sets of fine, floral-printed bed linens, half a dozen expensive towels, a colorful hooked rug to replace the faded bedroom carpet. He stocked the cupboard with a selection of tasty snack foods and wines suggested by glamorous TV ads, and on Wednesday made sure there were fresh flowers in all the rooms.

One afternoon Tom came into the museum with a small package for Philip. "It's from Angela. A token of her gratitude."

Philip tore off the wrapping paper to find a framed photograph of an attractive, grave-eyed woman with long black hair. It was inscribed: "To dear Philip who has given me new hope. Angela."

Dear Philip. And she didn't even know him! Something like rapture flooded Philip's heart. He was quite overcome. Later, at the house, he spent several minutes trying to decide where to place the photograph; finally he set it on the table beside his bed where in the night, if he awakened, he could switch on the lamp and look into those darkly romantic eyes. He seemed now permanently in the grip of some mysterious enchantment of the senses.

Not that Philip was a fool or wholly deluded himself. There were still times during the long afternoon hours when he would chide himself for making so much out of the situation, quite aware that he was doing no more than allowing himself the vicarious enjoyment of someone else's real-life romance, yet with a pleasure far more emotionally vivid than he'd ever derived from the romances of literature. So what's the harm, he asked himself. He was hurting no one.

Nor surely was there anything wrong in pretending, as Philip found himself doing more and more frequently, that Tom was no more than a stand-in for himself, that it was *he*, not Tom, who spent those hours of love with Angela. Tom himself fed this illusion when he asked if Philip would object to Angela's leaving a few garments at the house. Philip's game of make-believe acquired a fresh thrill when he arrived home that Wednesday night after midnight to find two filmy negligees and a peach-colored robe hanging in his closet. When he went to bed he spread the negligee beside him; awakening

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the night, he allowed his hand to steal out and caress the garment.

No longer did Philip come home, eat his solitary meal, settle down to read or watch TV or listen to music for a few hours before retiring. Heretofore an abstemious man, he found himself pouring one or more glasses of wine and pacing the floor as he held imaginary conversations with Angela, telling her the uneventful story of his life, revealing those long-hidden dreams and yearnings he'd never uttered to another living soul.

Philip's work began to suffer, finally to the point where he was obliged to spend a distressing half hour being quizzed by the curator.

"We all have problems now and then, Philip. I just wanted to be sure you're feeling all right. Getting enough sleep, are you?"

"I've never felt better in my life," replied Philip truthfully.

"You live alone, don't you, Philip?"

Philip started. "Why do you ask that?"

"No reason. I just wondered, what with your absentmindedness lately, if Cupid might be up to his tricks . . . or something."

Philip blushed, which did not add conviction to his denial. It tickled him that the man should attribute his dreaminess to romance. Thereafter, Philip dropped a few hints among his co-workers until it became a source of good-natured gossip among them that "old Philip's got a woman on the string."

Thank-you notes from Angela became longer, adding to Philip's deliciously furtive sense of being romantically involved; indeed, had a stranger read those notes he might easily have mistaken their expressions of gratitude for words of love.

Philip was now paying more attention to his own appearance. He bought new clothes, got his wispy hair styled instead of merely trimmed, bought new glasses, almost as if he knew that eventually he and Angela would meet, although Tom did not encourage such a meeting despite Philip's increasingly broad hints. Philip felt flattered that jealous Tom might regard Philip as a threat. Why else should he be so reluctant to let Angela meet him?

A week later there occurred the incident that crystallized for Philip what had remained until then no more than a wistful, dreamlike fantasy. He had formed the habit, having found it agreeable, of having dinner downtown a couple of times a week in addition to Wednesday. One evening, coming from a restaurant and walking toward his car, he saw the door to a bar open ahead of him and two people emerge. Philip stopped short. The marquee light illuminated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom's face. There was no mistaking it. He had his arm around a woman's shoulders, a blonde woman, most certainly not Angela.

A chill swept over Philip. As the couple moved away arm in arm, Philip followed. They stopped at a parking lot where Philip saw Tom open a car door before turning to embrace the woman. Their kiss seemed to last forever.

Philip trembled with rage at this evidence of his friend's duplicity.

When Tom next appeared at the museum Philip tried to mask his anger and disgust. "I maybe shouldn't mention this, Tom. It's really none of my business, but I happened to see you the other night."

"No kidding. Where was that?"

"Downtown. I'd been out to eat. I was passing a parking lot when I saw you. With a woman. A blonde."

Tom's wide blue eyes seemed to betray a momentary uneasiness. "What night was this?"

"Saturday."

Tom appeared to think. "This past Saturday? Impossible, old boy. Auntie wasn't feeling well. We spent the evening playing Scrabble. You must have seen one of my clones."

Philip shrugged. "You could be right. I'm still not used to these new glasses."

"Very spiffy, old boy. I must say, you've spruced yourself up these last few weeks. Trying to impress someone, are you? Maybe that cute little trick over there in Archives?"

"Sarah? Don't be ridiculous!"

Tom laughed. "Why, Philip, I do think you're blushing."

Philip didn't go to bed at all that night. He spent the hours until dawn pacing the floor, reviling Tom for his faithlessness, for betraying Angela's trust and abusing Philip's hospitality. Scrabble with Auntie, indeed! Did he think Philip was that dumb, that gullible? Behind Tom's perfidious charm and handsome face lurked a monster of deceit. This was the creature poor Angela was pinning her hopes and wasting her love on? It was hideously unfair.

Tom must be punished.

Philip considered and then rejected the idea of somehow contacting Angela and telling her the truth about Tom. But how? He didn't know her last name or where she lived.

Furthermore, would Angela even believe him? Would she despise him for being a meddlesome busybody?

But suppose Tom were out of the picture. Who else would Angela, once she knew how Philip felt about her, be likely to turn to?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By morning Philip had made up his mind what he must do.

When Tom came to the museum the following Wednesday afternoon, as he invariably did to make sure the coast would be clear that night, Philip greeted him with an air of polite reserve.

"I'm sorry, Tom," he said, "but we may have to discontinue our little Wednesday arrangement."

Tom's eyebrows lifted. "Why? Is something wrong?"

"Wrong? No, not exactly. But something's happened. Something we have to talk about."

"So give, old boy. What's the problem?"

Philip glanced around. "Not now. Later, when we're alone. I've got some work to get caught up on. I'm coming back later tonight. Could you meet me here after eleven? I don't want to spoil your evening with Angela, but when you leave my house could you stop off here? I'll leave the side door unlocked."

Tom affected an air of unconcern. "Sure. No problem."

"And for God's sake, Tom, don't tell Angela you're meeting me."

"You mean it's about Angela?"

"Well, in a way. You'll understand. It's nothing to get upset about."

Philip's mood lifted as soon as Tom left. He finished his work, tidied his desk, then went down into the basement—that dimly lighted region crammed with a miscellaneous assortment of artifacts misguided donors had foisted upon the museum over the years. Philip was amused to recall how Tom had perched upon the heavy lid of one of these antiquities, a primitive stone sarcophagus, and made vampire jokes the day Philip had taken him on a tour of the museum. Now, exploring among the shelves, Philip selected a small stone pre-Columbian figure, weighed it in his hand, decided it would do perfectly, and carried it back to his office, where he placed it on the corner of his desk.

He stopped at the florist's on his way home—in one of her notes Angela had mentioned carnations being her favorite flower—and later made himself a light dinner at the house before returning to the museum.

He did in fact have some cataloging to get caught up on and this occupied his mind for the next few hours, his attention straying only occasionally to the ugly stone figure regarding him with sightless, hooded eyes from the corner of his desk. When he heard the side door open Philip looked at his watch. It was precisely 11:15.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

* * *

Physically exhausted, he arrived home a few minutes past midnight. As he approached the house an extraordinary sight greeted his eyes: a cluster of people on the front walk, an ambulance in the driveway, and two police cars with lights flashing. Philip leaped from the car and made his way to the door, where he was admitted only after identifying himself.

The barrage of questions went on for hours, first at the house and later at police headquarters. Throughout it all Philip could not brush from his mind the gruesome vision of that bloodstained body lying on his bed.

In a state of tortured bewilderment he listened to the accusing voices of a trio of stony-eyed detectives as they kept hammering the facts into his brain:

"The woman's body was found in your house, Mr. Dyson. The murder weapon came from your kitchen. It bore only your fingerprints. The bloodied garments in your hamper are your own, you admit that. The woman's picture sat beside your bed. Her own garments hung in your closet. Letters from the dead woman were found in your desk. *And you sit there and tell us you've never even met Angela Barclay?"*

Only when forced to accept the irrefutable truth of that single fact—Angela was Tom's *wife,* not his *lover*—did Philip perceive the ingenious pattern of that monstrous deception.

With what uncanny insight Tom had assessed his "friend" 's character; how shrewdly he'd played upon his loneliness, his frustrations, his romantic and pathetic naivete. Like a magician, he'd created a web of illusion with no other purpose but to murder his wife and incriminate Philip.

He wondered if Tom had chosen that particular night to murder Angela, knowing Philip would be alone at the museum, without an alibi; or was it because Philip had told him the arrangement might end that night? And by what ruse, he wondered, had Tom enticed Angela to the house, there, in Philip's clothes and using a knife bearing Philip's prints, to kill her.

According to the detectives an unidentified woman had phoned the police shortly before eleven that night with a story of hearing screams coming from Philip's house. Even in his confused state Philip could deduce the woman's identity: the same woman he'd seen in town with Tom, the woman, not Angela, who must have spent those Wednesday nights with Tom in Philip's house.

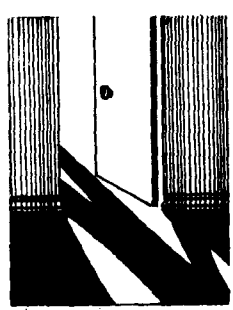
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Looking back, Philip realized there was no way he could prove the bizarre story he'd told the detectives was true, no way he could prove he hadn't murdered Angela.

With one final anguished cry of innocence Philip slumped back in his chair, subsiding into a silence of despair leaving him mutely unresponsive to any further questions.

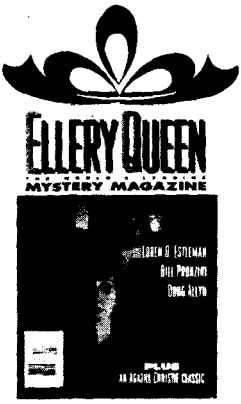
They said they hadn't yet been able to locate the dead woman's husband. That, thought Philip, might indeed be a problem. It might be years, even decades, before anyone again opened that stone sarcophagus in the basement of the museum.

Sometime in the night Philip awoke in his cell, a pale, visionary smile on his lips, his mind trapped in the fragile web of a dream. He was in his own little house, but he was not alone. Angela was with him, and would be with him always.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WRAP UP YOUR HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING



This holiday season give a subscription to **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.** It's the perfect gift and it will be appreciated throughout the year.

Once-a-year holiday rates are now in effect. Your first gift subscription costs only $20.95 for 15 issues. Each additional gift subscription is even less--just $16.95 for 15 issues.

Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine is also available at these low holiday rates. The first subscription costs only $20.95 for 15 issues, each additional subscription costs only $16.95 for 15 issues.

Giving a gift subscription is easy. Just fill out the form below or if you prefer, call **TOLL FREE 1-800-333-3053**.

Mail To: Ellery Queen
P.O. Box 7052
Red Oak, IA 51591

❑ Payment enclosed.
❑ Bill me.
❑ Please, renew my own subscription.

Gift to: _____ Bill to: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

❑ Ellery Queen ❑ Alfred Hitchcock

Gift recipients will begin their subscription in January, with the current issue.

We publish two double issues, in March and October.
Each double issue counts as two towards your subscription.
Foreign orders please add $6.00, (cash with order US funds).

YNWQ-8

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a ***NEW*** **Nick Velvet story by**

EDWARD D. HOCH

One of Mr. Hoch's most popular characters returns in this suspenseful Christmas caper. As street-corner Santas man the poor boxes and department-store Santas prepare for long lines of children, Nick Velvet is hired to steal a female Santa's long white beard. But this is no practical joke, for stalking the jolly old men in red is a deadly serious killer . . .

THE THEFT OF SANTA'S BEARD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The New York stores had closed at nine that evening, disgorging gift-laden Christmas shoppers by the hundreds. Most were too busy shifting the weight of their parcels and shopping bags to bother digging for coins as they passed the bell-ringing Santa on the corner. He was a bit thin and scraggly compared to the overstuffed Santas who worked the department stores and bounced tiny children on their knees while asking for their Christmas lists. His job was only to ring a little hand-held bell and accept donations in a chimney-shaped container.

This Santa's name was Russell Bajon and he'd come to the city expecting better things. After working at a variety of minimum-wage jobs and landing a couple of short-lived acting roles off Broadway, he'd taken the Santa Claus job for the holidays. There was no pay, but they supplied his meals and a place to sleep at night. And there were good fringe benefits, enough to keep him going till he was back on his feet with a part in a decent play.

After another fifteen minutes the crowd from the stores had pretty well scattered. There were still people on the dark streets, as there would be for most of the night, but those remaining hurried by his

© *1992 by Edward D. Hoch.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chimney without even a glance. He waited a few more minutes and then decided to pack up. The truck would be coming by shortly to collect the chimney and give him a ride back to the men's dorm where he slept.

He was bending over the chimney with its collection basket when someone bumped him from behind. He straightened and tried to turn, but by that time the thin copper wire was cutting into his throat.

By the time the second Santa Claus had been strangled to death, the tabloids had the story on page one. *No Clues to Claus Killer*, one of them trumpeted, while another proclaimed, *Santa Strangler Strikes Again*. Nick Velvet glanced over the articles with passing interest, but at that point they were nothing to directly affect him.

"Where was the latest killing?" Gloria asked as she prepared breakfast.

"In the subway. An elderly Santa on his way to work."

She shook her head. "What's this world coming to when somebody starts strangling Santa Clauses?"

The next morning Nick found out. He was seated in the office of the Intercontinental Protection Service, across the desk from a man named Grady Culhane. The office was small and somewhat plain, not what Nick had expected from the pretentious name. Culhane himself was young, barely past thirty, with black hair, thick eyebrows, and an Irish smile. He spread his hands flat on the uncluttered desktop and said, "I understand you steal things of little or no value."

"That's correct," Nick replied. "My standard fee is twenty-five thousand dollars, unless it's something especially hazardous."

"This should be simple enough. I want you to steal the beard from a department store Santa Claus. It's the Santa at Kliman's main store, and it must be done tomorrow before noon. Santa's hours there are noon to four and five to eight."

"What makes it so valuable to you?"

"Nothing. It's worth no more than any other false white beard. I just need it tomorrow."

"I usually get half the money down and the other half after the job," Nick said. "Is that agreeable?"

"Sure. It'll have to be a check. I don't have that much cash on hand."

"So long as I can cash it at your bank."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He made out the check and handed it over. "Here's a sketch map I drew of Kliman's fourth floor. This is the dressing room Santa uses."

"So the beard is probably there before noon. Why don't you just walk in and steal it?" Nick wondered. "Why do you need me?"

"You ever been in Kliman's? They've got security cameras all over the store, including hidden ones in the dressing rooms. This is only Santa's room during the Christmas season. The rest of the year it's used by the public, and the camera is probably still operational. I can't afford to be seen stealing the beard or anything else."

"What about me?"

"That's your job. That's what I'm paying you for."

"Fair enough," Nick agreed, folding the check once and slipping it into his pocket. "I'll be back here tomorrow with the beard."

Nothing had been said about the two Santa Claus killings, but somehow, as Nick Velvet left the building, he had the feeling he was becoming involved in something a lot more complex than a simple robbery.

The Santa Claus killings were still big news the following morning, and Nick read the speculations about possible motives as he traveled into midtown on the subway. The second man to die, Larry Averly, was a retired plumber who'd been earning some spare cash as a holiday Santa Claus. The first victim, Bajon, had died on Monday evening, the fourteenth, while the second death came the following morning. Nick had the feeling the press was almost disappointed that another killing had not followed on Wednesday. Now it was Thursday, eight days before Christmas, and the street before Kliman's block-long department store was crowded with shoppers.

He entered the store with the first wave of customers when the doors opened at ten, making his way up the escalator to the fourth floor. After a half-hour of lingering in the furniture department, he wandered over to the dressing-room door that Grady Culhane had indicated on his map. When no one was looking, he slipped inside.

His first task was to locate the closed-circuit television camera. He found it without difficulty—a circular lens embedded in the very center of a round wall clock. Not wanting to blot out the view entirely and arouse the suspicion of possible observers, Nick moved a coat rack in front of the clock, blocking most of the little room. Then he quickly opened a pair of lockers. But there was no Santa Claus costume, no beard, in either one. He'd been hoping that the store's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Santa changed into his costume on the premises, but it looked as if he might come to work already dressed, like the street Santa who'd been strangled in the subway.

If that was the case, however, Culhane wouldn't have told him to come to this room. It was already nearly eleven and Nick decided to wait till noon to see what happened. He positioned himself behind the clothes rack, but at the far end, away from the television camera. Exactly at eleven-thirty, the door opened and someone came in. He could see a tall, fairly broad-shouldered person carrying a large canvas tote bag. There was a flash of red as a Santa Claus suit came into view.

Nick Velvet breathed a sigh of relief. The white beard came out of the bag and he saw the prize within his grasp. He stepped from his hiding place, ready to deliver a knockout blow if necessary. "Keep quiet and give me the beard," he said.

The figure turned and Nick froze in his tracks. Santa was a woman.

She was probably in her late thirties, large boned but not unattractive, with dark brown hair that was already partly covered by the Santa Claus wig and cap. Nick's sudden appearance seemed not to have frightened her but only angered her as any unexpected interruption might. "You just made the mistake of your life, mister," she told him in a flat tone of voice.

"I don't want to hurt you. Give me that beard."

"I have a transmitter in my pocket. I've already called for help."

He realized suddenly that she thought he was the Santa strangler. "I'm not here to hurt you," he tried to assure her.

But it was too late for assurances. The dressing-room door burst open and Nick faced two men with drawn revolvers. "Freeze!" the first man ordered, crouching in a shooter's stance. "Police!"

"Look, this is all a mistake."

"And you made it, mister!" The second man moved behind Nick to frisk him.

Nick decided it was time for a bit of his own electronic technology. He brought his left arm down enough to hit the small transmitter in his breast pocket. Immediately there was a sharp crack from the direction of the furniture department, and billowing smoke could be seen through the open dressing-room door. The first man turned his head and Nick kicked the gun from his hand, poking his elbow back simultaneously to catch the second detective in the ribs. As he went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out the door he made a grab for the white beard the lady Santa was holding in her hand, but he missed by several inches.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" one of the detectives yelled, but Nick knew he wouldn't. The floor was crowded with shoppers, and the cloud from Nick's well-placed smoke bomb was already enveloping everyone.

Five minutes later he was out of the store and safely away, but without the beard he'd been hired to steal.

Later that afternoon Nick returned to the office of the Intercontinental Protection Service. Grady Culhane was not in a pleasant mood. "That was you at the store this morning, wasn't it?" he asked pointedly. "The radio says someone set off a smoke bomb and two shoppers were slightly injured in the panic."

"I'm sorry if anyone was hurt. You didn't tell me Santa Claus was a woman. That threw off my timing and enabled a couple of detectives to get the drop on me."

"What about the beard?"

"I didn't get it."

Culhane cursed. "That means Santa will be back in place as soon as they get the smoke cleared out and things back to normal."

Nick was beginning to see at least a portion of the scheme. "You wanted the beard stolen so Santa couldn't appear."

"Sure. It was easier than stealing the whole costume, except that you bungled it."

"They could have found another beard quickly enough," Nick argued.

Grady Culhane shook his head. "They don't sell them in the store. I checked. The delay would have been an hour or two, and that was all I needed."

"For what?"

He eyed Nick uncertainly for a moment before deciding to yield. "All right, I'll tell you about it. But I want something in return. I want that beard tomorrow, and no slip-ups this time!"

"You'll have it, so long as you play square with me. What's this all about? Does it involve the Santa Claus killings?"

The dark-haired young man reached into a desk drawer and extracted a sheet of paper which he passed across the desk to Nick. It was a copy of a crudely printed extortion letter addressed to the president of Kliman's department store: "Tuesday, December 15—I have just come from killing my second Santa Claus of the Christmas season. The deaths of Bajon and Averly were meant as a demonstra-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion. A third Santa Claus will die in your store, in full view of the children, unless you are prepared to pay me one million dollars in cash within forty-eight hours, by noon Thursday." There was no signature.

"Sounds like a crackpot," Nick decided, returning the letter. "He doesn't even give directions for paying the money."

"This letter was hand-delivered by a messenger service Tuesday afternoon. A second letter came yesterday, with instructions. They haven't shown me that one."

"You've been hired by Kliman's store?"

Culhane nodded. "Frankly, it's the first major client I've had. Even though the police have been called in, the store is paying me as a personal bodyguard for Santa."

"Or Mrs. Santa."

He smiled. "She's an unemployed actress named Vivian Delmos. I just met her yesterday after I talked with you. There are some female Santas around. They're good with children. If their voices are deep enough and the suit is padded enough, no one knows the difference. I didn't know the cops would be guarding her too."

"How much are they paying you?" Nick asked.

"That's proprietary information," the young man answered stiffly.

"I figure fifty thousand, at least, if you can afford to pay me twenty-five."

"I don't get a thing if the Santa strangler kills her."

"You thought he'd strike right at noon, so you needed me to keep her from going out there then. That means they decided not to pay."

"It's not just them. There are other stores involved. The killer is trying to shake down the largest stores in New York."

"The police must have a description from the messenger company that delivered this note."

Grady Culhane shook his head. "They deny any knowledge of it. One of their messengers was probably stopped in the street and paid to deliver it. Naturally he won't admit it now and risk losing his job."

"What happens after the smoke is cleared out?"

"The Delmos woman puts on her beard and goes back out there. I'll probably have to be standing next to her, and I'm too big for those elves' costumes."

"Don't worry," Nick promised. "This time I'll get the beard."

On his second visit to the store Nick Velvet wore a grey wig and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a matching false moustache. He was taking no chances on coming face-to-face with one of those detectives again. In the atrium at the center of the main floor where Santa's throne was in place, a sign announced that he would not return until noon the following day due to the illness of one of his reindeer. Nick found a pay telephone and called Culhane at his office.

"You're off the hook until tomorrow," he said.

"I just heard from the store."

"Do you still want the beard?"

"Of course—unless the police come up with the extortionist by then."

Nick hung up and decided he should know more than he did about the Santa Claus killings. He went down to the subway newsstand and bought all the local papers. It wasn't the lead item anymore but the unsolved killings still filled several columns inside each paper. The first victim, Russell Bajon, was a young homeless man—a would-be actor—who'd been staying at the men's dorm maintained by a charitable organization. He'd been collecting money for the charity at one of their Christmas chimneys when he'd been strangled. One of the other Santas, a man named Chris Stover, had come by in a van a few minutes later to find a crowd gathering around the fallen man. No one admitted to having seen the actual killing.

The second victim had followed less than twelve hours later, on Tuesday morning. Larry Averly lived in a run-down hotel on the fringes of Greenwich Village, a place where Nick had grown up. His Christmas job as a Santa Claus for a local radio station's holiday promotion involved coming to work in costume that day, since they were doing a remote broadcast from the Central Park skating rink. He'd been heading for a subway exit near the park when the killer struck. This time two people saw the attack and scared him off, but not in time to save the victim. The killer was described as a white man of uncertain age wearing a bulky coat. Averly hadn't been carrying any identification in his shabby wallet and it had taken police most of the day to trace his room key to the hotel where he'd been staying. The radio station had hired him through an employment agency and didn't even know his name. They'd finally learned it just in time for the six o'clock news.

The papers, of course, carried nothing about the extortion plot. That would have been enough to get the story back on page one. Nick read them all and then tossed them aside. He had his own problem to consider. Stealing Santa's beard the following day would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be next to impossible in Kliman's store, but the alternatives were equally impossible. He knew Vivian Delmos carried her costume to work in a large canvas bag, but he wasn't about to mug her on the way to work. Still . . .

Culhane had mentioned that the lady Santa Claus was an unemployed actress. Nick phoned Actors' Equity and had her address within minutes. Vivian Delmos resided on East Forty-ninth Street. He called her number and got the expected answering machine. Next he phoned Gloria to say that he wouldn't be home till late.

The address on Forty-ninth was past Third Avenue, in an apartment building across the street from the Turtle Bay block. The Delmos woman must have been successful at some stage of her career to afford the moderately high rents in the neighborhood. There was no answer to Nick's ring so he took up a position down the block on the other side of the street. Within twenty minutes he saw Vivian Delmos appear, walking briskly and carrying her canvas bag. He crossed the street to intercept her at her door, but she was a bit faster than he'd realized. She was halfway through the door by the time he reached it.

Blocking its closing with his hand, he began, "Miss Delmos—"

She turned, recognized him instantly, and acted without a word, yanking on his wrist and pulling him inside but off balance. He felt himself falling forward as she twisted his arm behind him. Then he was on the floor, his cheek pressed against the hall carpeting, while she pulled painfully on the arm. Her foot was on his neck.

"Mister, you just made your second big mistake. I hope you don't mind a broken arm."

"Wait a minute! I just want to talk!"

"How'd you find me? Did you follow me home?"

"Through Equity."

"Got a job for me?" She gave his arm a painful wrench. "I'm real good in action parts."

"I don't doubt it! Please let me up."

"Nice and slow," she warned, relaxing the pressure on his arm. "We're going upstairs while I call the police."

"All right."

She led him ahead of her up the stairs, keeping a grip on his arm. They paused outside a door at the top while she put down the canvas bag and got out her key. "Inside!"

The apartment was large but plainly furnished, as if in some sort of limbo while awaiting its permanent decor. "I'm not trying to kill

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you," Nick assured her. "When you saw me earlier I was only trying to steal your beard."

"My what?"

"The beard from your Santa Claus outfit."

She released his arm and gave him a shove toward the sofa. "What's your name?"

"Nick Velvet. I steal things." He decided to stay on the sofa for the moment. Facing her now, he had a chance to confirm his earlier impressions. She was into early middle age but still had a good figure. By the strength she'd shown in overpowering him, he guessed that she worked out regularly. It had been an unlucky day from the start.

"I'm Vivian Delmos, but I guess you know that. You called me by name." She walked to the phone without taking her eyes off him.

"I was hired to steal your beard," he told her. "You have nothing to fear from me."

"The people at Kliman's weren't too happy when you set off that smoke bomb."

"I only did it to escape. If I hadn't needed it I'd have returned later and removed it."

"What does all this have to do with the Santa strangler?"

"The killings are part of an extortion plot against the big department stores. My job was to keep you from being the next victim."

"By stealing my beard?" She gave a snort of disbelief. "Kliman's wanted to replace me with a cop but I wouldn't let them. I finally convinced everyone I could take care of myself, but they still made me carry that beeper. And this noon after you tried to attack me—"

"Steal your beard," Nick corrected.

"—steal my beard, they canceled Santa's appearances for the rest of the day. I lost a day's pay because of you!"

"Give me the beard and stay home tomorrow, too. I'll pay you a thousand dollars for it."

"Are you whacky or something?"

"Just a good businessman. I'm getting too old to be tossed around by a woman who works out at the gym every day."

"Three times a week," she corrected. "I'm an actress and I find it a good way to keep fit."

Nick worked his shoulder a bit, getting the kinks out. "It sure doesn't keep me fit. How about it? A thousand dollars?"

"They'll find another beard for me, or use the cop after all." She'd moved away from the phone at least, and Nick was thankful for that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's the easiest money you'll ever make. Far easier than doing some off-Broadway play eight times a week."

"How'd you know I was off-Broadway?" she asked, immediately suspicious.

"I guessed. What difference does it make?"

"You didn't—" she began and then cut herself short. "Look, I'll agree to your condition if you do one thing for me."

"What's that?"

"I want you to go down to the men's dorm at the Outreach Center and pick up Russell Bajon's belongings."

"Bajon? The first victim?"

"That's right."

"Did you know him?"

"Slightly. We appeared in a play together."

Nick shook his head. "I don't understand any of this. What right do you have to his belongings?"

"As much right as anyone. The paper says he left no family."

"But why would you want his things?"

"Just to remember him by. He was a nice guy."

"Why can't you get them yourself?"

"I don't want people to see me there."

It was a weak reason, and her whole story was weak, but Nick was into it now. Unless he wanted to risk seriously injuring her, it seemed the only way to get the beard. "All right. I'll go down there now and then I'll be back for the beard."

Outside it had started to snow a little, but somehow it didn't seem much like the week before Christmas.

The Outreach Center was a sort of nondenominational mission located on the West Side near the river. Some of their operating expenses came from the city, but much of the money was from private donors. The Center gave homeless people a safe place to sleep if they were afraid of the city shelters, but certain rules applied. Drugs, alcohol, and weapons were forbidden, and guests of the Center were expected to earn their keep. In December that often meant dressing up in a Santa Claus suit and manning one of the Center's plywood chimneys with a donation bag inside.

The first person Nick saw as he entered the front door of the Outreach Center was a young man in sweater and jeans seated at an unpretentious card table. "I've come to pick up Russell Bajon's belongings," Nick told him. "The family sent me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The young man seemed indifferent to the request. Apparently people who stayed at the men's dorm weren't expected to have anything worth stealing. "I'll get Chris."

Nick waited in the bare hallway until the young man returned with an older worker with thinning hair, wearing a faded Giants sweatshirt. "*I'm Chris Stover. What can I do for you?*"

"Russell Bajon's family sent me for his belongings."

The man frowned. "Didn't know he had a family. There sure wasn't much in the way of belongings. We were going to throw them out."

"Could I see them?"

Stover hesitated and then led him down the corridor to a storage room. For all its drabness, the dormitory building seemed to be well fitted for its clients, with a metal railing along the wall and smoke alarms in the ceiling. Nick stood by the door as Stover pulled out some boxes from one shelf in the storage room. "If I'd been five minutes earlier, Russ might be alive today," he said.

"I think I saw your name in the paper—"

"Sure! I placed him there and I was picking him up. When I rounded the corner I saw a crowd of people gathering. He was dead by the time I got to him."

"Nobody saw anything?"

"I guess not. Who pays attention in New York? I swear once I was driving by Radio City Music Hall about six in the morning, when they were having their Christmas show. Some guy was walking two camels around the block for their morning exercise and hardly anyone even noticed." He slit open the tape on one of the boxes and peered inside. "Nothing but clothing in here."

"I'll just take it along anyway."

When he opened the second box he frowned a bit. "Well, there are some letters in this one, and a couple of books." He looked up at Nick. "Maybe I should have some sort of authorization to release these."

"I can give you his sister's phone number." He'd worked that out with Vivian in advance. "You can check with her."

"Never heard about a sister," the man muttered. Then, "Our director is away today. I better wait till he gets back. Come back tomorrow."

"Sure thing." Nick turned to leave, his hand unobtrusively on the door's latchbolt. Stover shut the door and they walked back down the corridor together.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"See you later," the man told him and disappeared into a little office.

Immediately Nick turned and vaulted onto the handrail that ran along the wall, steadying himself with one hand against the ceiling. With his other hand he reached toward one of the smoke alarms. This model had a plastic button in the center of the unit for testing the battery, and he shoved a thin dime between the button and the casing, keeping it depressed. Immediately a loud blaring noise filled the hall. He jumped down to the floor as people began to look out of the rooms.

Some headed immediately for the exits while others stood around looking for some sign of smoke. Nick slipped into the storeroom just as Chris Stover emerged from his office to join the others. There was little chance of getting out with two boxes so Nick settled for the one containing the letters and books. He peeked down the hall and saw that Stover had gotten a ladder from somewhere to examine the blaring alarm. Perhaps he had noticed the edge of the dime holding the button in.

Nick went out the storeroom window as the smoke alarm was suddenly silenced.

Vivian Delmos seemed just a bit surprised to see him back so soon. "I thought you were going to get me Russell Bajon's things."

"I did. They're in this box. There was another box with a few pants and shirts, but I figured this was what you wanted."

"I'll know soon enough."

She opened the box and began looking through the objects, setting aside a worn pair of shoes and some socks and handkerchiefs. When she came to the books she examined them more carefully. One was a paperback edition of some of Shakespeare's tragedies, the others were a small dictionary and a book on acting. But she soon tossed these aside too, and turned only briefly to the letters, shaking the envelopes to make certain nothing small was hidden in them.

"You got the wrong box," she grumbled.

"I'm sorry."

She seemed to relent then. "No, what I'm looking for probably wasn't in the other box either. Somebody told me Bajon was involved with a shoplifting ring, stealing watches and jewelry from fancy stores during the Christmas season. I thought if he had anything in his belongings—"

"—that you'd take it?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She flushed a bit at Nick's words. "I'm no thief. When Russell and I were in the play together I loaned him a few hundred dollars. I could use that money now. I figured anything I found among his belongings would pay the debt."

"Any jewelry or valuables he had were probably removed by whoever went through his clothes." As he spoke he was looking down at one of the envelopes that had been in the box. It was addressed to Russell Bajon at the Outreach Center. The return address bore only the surname of the sender: *Averly*.

It took him a few seconds to realize the significance of the name. The Santa strangler's second victim had been named Larry Averly. Nick slipped the letter out of the envelope and read the few lines quickly: "Russ—I was happy to do you the favor. No need to send me any more money. Keep some of the pie for yourself. Merry Christmas! Larry." The note was undated, but the envelope had been postmarked December second.

Nick returned the letter to its envelope and slipped it into his pocket. It told him nothing, except that the two victims might have known each other. Maybe Bajon had replaced Averly as one of the Santas.

"Thanks for your efforts anyway," Vivian Delmos said.

"I did what I could."

When he didn't move, she asked, "Are you waiting for something more?"

"Yes."

"What's that?"

"Your beard."

That evening Nick returned to Grady Culhane's little office off Times Square. The young security man seemed uneasy as soon as he walked in the door. "I was hoping you wouldn't come here," he said.

Nick opened the paper bag he was carrying. "Why's that? I've brought you the beard."

"The beard was yesterday. Things have moved beyond that now. The cops are all over the place."

"What do you mean?"

"The extortion payoff. The money was left exactly as instructed, on the upper deck of the ferry that left Staten Island at three o'clock, before the evening rush hour. The police had it covered from every angle, even if he'd tossed the package overboard to a waiting boat."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What happened?"

"Nothing. When the ferry docked in Manhattan some little old lady picked up the package and turned it in to lost and found."

"She got to it before the extortionist."

"Maybe," Culhane answered gloomily.

"What's the matter?"

"The Outreach Center reported that someone was snooping around the first victim's things this afternoon and stole a box."

"That was me."

"I was afraid it might be. That means the cops are after you."

"How come?"

"They figure the killer was at the Outreach Center and that's why he couldn't pick up the extortion money from the three o'clock ferry."

"I certainly don't go around strangling Santas!" Nick objected. "You didn't even hire me till after the killings."

"I know, but try to tell them that! They need a fall guy, right away, or the city could lose millions in Christmas sales this final week. Who wants to bring the kids to see Santa Claus if he might be dead?"

A thought suddenly struck Nick. "You seemed nervous when I came in. Are they watching this office?"

"I had to tell them you were the one who set off the smoke bomb in the store yesterday. They were spending too much time on that angle and I tried to show them it was a dead end by admitting my part in it. Instead they got to thinking you were involved somehow."

"Just give me the rest of my money and I'm out of here."

"I don't have it right now."

Nick decided he'd overstayed his welcome. "I'll be in touch," he promised as he headed for the door.

They were waiting in the hall. A tall black man with a badge in one hand and a gun in the other barked, "Police! Up against the wall!"

His name was Sergeant Rynor and he was no more friendly within the confines of the precinct station. "You deny you were at the Outreach Center between three and four this afternoon, Mr. Velvet?"

"I told you I want a lawyer," Nick answered.

"He'll be here soon enough. And when he arrives we're going to run a lineup. Then we'll talk about the Santa Claus killings."

Ralph Aarons was a dapper Manhattan attorney whom Nick had used on rare occasions. He wasn't in the habit of getting in legal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jams, especially in the New York area. Aarons made a good appearance, but he was hardly the sort to defend an accused serial Santa strangler.

"They've got a witness named Stover," the lawyer told him. "If he can place you at the Outreach Center, it may be trouble."

"We'll see," Nick said. He'd been thinking hard while he waited for Aarons to arrive.

Sergeant Rynor appeared in the doorway. "We're ready for you, Velvet. Up here on stage, please."

There were five other men, and Nick took the third position. The others were about his age and size but with different coloring and appearance. He guessed at least two of them were probably detectives. Chris Stover was brought in and escorted into a booth with a one-way glass. Over a loudspeaker, each of them was asked to step forward in turn. Then it was over. Apparently it had taken only a moment for Stover to identify him.

As Nick was being led away, Chris Stover and the other detectives came out of the booth. Nick paused ten feet from him and pointed dramatically. "That's the man!" his voice thundered like the wrath of God. "He's the one who killed the Santas and I can prove it!"

Nick couldn't prove it, and Chris Stover should have snorted and kept on walking. But he was taken off guard, startled into a foolish action. Perhaps in that unthinking instant he imagined the whole lineup had been merely a trick to unmask him. He gave one terrified glance at Nick and then tried to run, shoving two detectives out of the way in his dash for freedom.

It was Sergeant Rynor who finally grabbed him, before he even got close to the door.

"We're holding him," the black detective told Nick Velvet ten minutes later in the interrogation room, "but you'd better have a good story. Are you trying to tell us that Chris Stover is the extortionist who's been threatening the city's department stores for the past several days?"

"I don't think there was ever a real extortion plot. It was a matter of a big threat being used as a smokescreen to hide a smaller but no less deadly crime—the murders of Russell Bajon and Larry Averly."

"You'd better explain that."

Nick leaned back in the chair and collected his thoughts. "Grady Culhane told me about the extortion threats and even showed me a copy of the first letter. It was delivered to Kliman's president on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tuesday afternoon, shortly after the second strangling of a Santa Claus. Those two killings were meant to appear to be random acts against two random Santas, committed as a demonstration that the extortionist meant business. But the note mentioned the names of the two victims—Bajon and Averly. You didn't identify the second victim until later that day, and the killer had no chance to steal identification from his victim. The strangler knew the names of Bajon and Averly because these killings weren't random at all. He deliberately selected these victims, not as part of an extortion plot but for another motive altogether."

Rynor was making notes now, along with taping Nick's interrogation. Ralph Aarons, perhaps sensing things were going well for Nick, made no attempt to interrupt. "What other motive?" the detective asked.

"I learned earlier today that Bajon might have been involved in a shoplifting ring. And I also have a letter here that the second victim sent to Bajon two weeks ago. Not only did they know each other, but Averly had arranged for Bajon to take over some money-making enterprise from him. I think you'll find that Averly used to act as a Santa Claus for the Outreach Center. This year he passed the job on to Bajon, who became involved with the shoplifting."

"You're telling me that a man dressed in a bulky and highly visible Santa Claus costume was shoplifting?"

"No, I'm telling you that Santa stood on the corner with his collection chimney and the shoplifters came out of the stores with watches, rings, and other jewelry, and dropped them in the chimney. If the man was caught, there was no evidence on him, and the store detectives never considered Santa as an accessory."

"It's just wild enough to be true. But why would Stover kill them?"

"Bajon must have been skimming off the loot, or threatening to blackmail Stover. Once he decided to kill Bajon, he knew he had to kill Averly too, because the older man knew what was going on. When I guessed about Santa's chimney being used for shoplifting loot, Chris Stover became the most likely brains behind the operation. After all, he was the one who picked up the Santas and chimneys each night. He was the one who told them where to stand. Only Monday night he parked the van in the next block and walked up and strangled Bajon, then hurried back to the van and acted like he was just driving up."

"Maybe," Sergeant Rynor said thoughtfully. "It could have been like that. The extortion letter was just a red herring to cover the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

real motive. He never had any intention of going after that money on the Staten Island ferry."

"Can you prove all this?" Aarons asked, his legal mind in gear.

"We'll get a search warrant for Stover's office and room at the Center. If we find any shoplifted items there, I think he'll be ready to talk, and name the rest of the gang."

Nick knew he wasn't off the hook unless they found what they were looking for, but he came up lucky. The police uncovered dozens of jewelry items, along with a spool of wire that matched the wire used to kill the two Santas. After that, Chris Stover ceased his denials.

The way things turned out, Nick never did collect the balance of his fee from Grady Culhane. Some people just didn't have any Christmas spirit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA OWENS

Once an aspiring actress, Barbara Owens Weiman holds a degree in theatre, but somewhere along the way, she told EQMM, *she realized there would be more satisfaction for her in creating her own characters and dialogue than in portraying roles conceived by others on stage.* EQMM *gave the author her start in 1978 in the Department of First Stories, and when that first venture won the Edgar Allan Poe award, her career was successfully launched. She has gone on to write for many other magazines, including* Twilight Zone, *in whose pages producers found the Barbara Owen's story that premiered the syndicated TV series* Tales From the Darkside *in 1984. We presented several of her stories earlier this year, and we close 1992 with an offering from Ms. Owen's we think you'll enjoy . . .*

TEENY ANN

by BARBARA OWENS

Right now I'm just sitting here thinking. About a lot of things. Mama and me mostly, about what's going to happen.

Mama calls me Teeny Ann, but my real name is Christine Ann Budroe. I'm eight years old and practically grown up, but I'm little for my age. That's how it got started. Mama used to say my name like one word—ChristineAnn—and one day she said I was hardly growing at all. She told me I ought to be called ChristeenyAnn, and from then on I was Teeny Ann. I don't like it. It's a dumb name. I've told her over and over not to do it, but she just laughs. She says it's a cute name, that I'm only a little kid and don't know nothing. That's not true. I guess I know how I like my own name.

© *1992 by Barbara Owens.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In my first school, my best friend was named Betty Farr. She didn't like her nickname either, so I called her Elizabeth and she called me Christine. We liked each other a lot, but I didn't get to know her very long because we moved. Mama and I do a lot of moving. Now I'm in this town that I don't even know the name of. And I don't go to school at all, even though I'm supposed to be in the third grade and am usually the best speller in my class.

I've been in five towns and five schools because Mama and I move around so much. The reason is, Daddy keeps finding me. He and Mama are divorced. That means they hate each other's guts and can't stand to live in the same house anymore. Mama told me that.

Daddy still loves me, though. The last time he found me he came to my school at recess. I showed him how high I could swing. Daddy looked real sad. He said he's working hard to save money for a lawyer. Then I can go live with him all the time. I'd really like to do that. I miss him. I miss Grandma Budroe too. The thing I like about Daddy is he stays in one place. He's always nice to me and he calls me Christine. I wanted to go with him right then, but he said that would be wrong; he could get in trouble with the law. We had to do it right, he said, with a lawyer and a judge. But he told me not to worry. He knows for sure that the judge will let me go right off to live with him when he finds out how Mama plays around and keeps moving so Daddy can't find me. Mama's just being spiteful, he said. I understood most of that, except for the part about Mama playing around. She works all day and goes out with boyfriends at night, so she never has time to play. I felt bad, but I said okay, and Daddy made me promise not to tell her that he'd found me again.

She found out somehow, though, because the next day we just up and moved here. Now I don't have a school and I can't even go outside—I have to stay in the house all the time. Mama locks the doors when she leaves and takes away the key. I don't think anyone in this town even knows I'm here. I guess she doesn't ever want Daddy to find me this time.

The house we live in is teeny, like me. It only has four rooms—a kitchen, a living room, Mama's bedroom, and a little room I sleep in next to the kitchen. We don't have a telephone either. One time, in the last town, Mama caught me trying to get the operator to find Daddy. I got a good whipping. I guess that's why we don't have one this time.

The backyard's full of tall weeds, but there's a big tree out there. I wish I could go out and play in it, but Mama says no. Once I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watched our neighbor lady through the window when she was working in her garden. She looked nice, like Grandma Budroe. I guess she saw me too, because Mama came home mad. She said the neighbor lady asked her if she had a little girl. Mama said it was my fault she had to lie, and she locked me in the bathroom for two whole days. She even took the light bulb so it would be dark. I was scared—there were big bugs in there. Before she let me out she made me promise never to get close to the windows again. Mama's got an awful temper when she gets mad.

But there is one real good thing about this house. My secret place—the first one I ever had. It has a little round table in the living room and Mama put Grandma Budroe's big tablecloth on it. Mama loves that tablecloth. She says it's very expensive and by rights it belongs to Daddy, but she took it the first time we moved. It's the exact same color as lemon candy, and it's so big that it hangs over the table almost to the floor. There's just a bitty little space left at the bottom. That's my secret place. I go under there to play with my paper dolls. It's the best place—sometimes when the light comes through the yellow cloth it's like being inside sunshine.

Mama doesn't know about it. Lots of times when she thinks I'm in my room I'm under there. I hear all kinds of things not meant for little ears. That's how Grandma Budroe used to tease me. She said I was so smart because I heard too many things not meant for little ears. That's how I found where Mama works—at Woolworth's. She wouldn't tell me, but she kept bringing me new paper dolls and I'm such a good speller that I read the sacks. And one night I heard her and Charlie talking about her job at Woolworth's. That's the same way I found out Daddy works for the telephone company—I heard her tell Charlie. If I didn't have my secret place under the table I'd never find out anything.

I had to be careful that Mama didn't find out about it, though. She'd whip me for sure—might even put me back in the bathroom and lock the door. I know she's got a bad temper, but sometimes I wonder if she even likes me.

And then sometimes I think she does. She's always bringing me new paper dolls. And one night, right after we moved here, she made some fudge. We played games and had a real good time. After she drank a lot of beer she got to laughing—just like she used to before she and Daddy started fighting so much. She said it was funny how Daddy kept running around trying to find me. She asked did I want to see him, and I said yes I did. She stopped laughing then. After a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

while, she said oh hell, maybe she could break down and let him see his kid sometimes. I figured I'd better not say how much I'd like that. I was afraid it would make her mad. I knew she didn't like Daddy anymore and she probably didn't want me to like him either.

After Charlie came to live with us, Mama didn't have any more time for me and fudge. Charlie didn't even know about me until the day he moved in. He looked so funny when he saw me—his eyebrows went right up to where his hair was, and his eyes bugged out.

Mama hollered, "Surprise!" She laughed, but Charlie didn't, and later that night Mama told me to stay out of Charlie's way. Whenever he was home I had to go to my room by the kitchen and stay there.

That was fine with me. I didn't like him much. He was skinny and his breath smelled bad. He talked mean to Mama all the time. Besides, I didn't always go to my room. Sometimes, when they thought I was in there, I was in my secret place under the table. That way I could listen and find out things. The only good thing about Charlie was he didn't call me Teeny Ann. He didn't call me anything—just "that kid." "Get that kid outa here. I've had a hard day." Or, "Why's that kid takin' so long in the bathroom? I got to get in there."

But Mama and Charlie were gone most of the time, so I stayed by myself. I played under the table with my paper dolls and made up stories about how Daddy would find me again and I'd go live with him. I would go to school and play with Betty Farr.

Charlie and Mama never did get along good. They drank beer and went out to do the town a lot—that's what Mama called it. But they did a lot of fighting too. Charlie was different from Daddy. Daddy never had a bad temper, but Charlie did. He didn't just walk out and slam the door, he yelled right back at Mama when her temper got going. Sometimes I'd lie real still in my bed and listen. It was interesting, because some of the fighting was about me.

Charlie didn't want me around. He'd yell at Mama to send that kid back to her daddy, that kid was just in the way. Then Mama would yell she wouldn't give the bastard the satisfaction. Every time I heard her say that I'd feel bad, because the night we made fudge she said she might sometimes.

Most of the fighting, though, was because Mama thought Charlie had other girlfriends. He worked at a tavern, and he was always bragging about the babes that came in there. Then Mama would get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mad and light into him. After a while they fought just about all the time.

The night they had the really big fight, Mama was sewing in her bedroom. She'd brought me some new paper dolls that day, and I was supposed to be in bed, but I'd snuck back out when she wasn't looking and was playing quiet with them under the table. She was already mad because Charlie hadn't come home for supper like he was supposed to.

It was so warm inside Grandma Budroe's tablecloth that I fell asleep. The two of them fighting in Mama's bedroom woke me up. They sounded really mad. I was just getting ready to sneak back to my room when Charlie came out of their bedroom with her right behind him. I could even see them if I stretched out on my stomach and stuck my eye up against the little space at the bottom.

Charlie had a bunch of his clothes in his arms. He was yelling about getting outa here and never coming back. Mama waved her sewing scissors at him. Her face was red, and she yelled back at him, "You ain't leaving! No man's ever gonna leave me again!"

She reached out to grab his arm like she was going to stop him, but Charlie just laughed and shoved her against the wall. He said he'd like to *see* her stop him. I'd never seen Daddy shove Mama like that. It must have made her really mad because she jumped at him and punched him—right in the neck with the hand holding the scissors. Mama's not very big, but she's strong. I guess Charlie wasn't expecting her to do that because he fell down right on the floor. He made some funny sounds for a while, then he didn't make them anymore, he just stayed down. I was too surprised to move. Mama had knocked out a grown-up man!

She must have been surprised too, because she just stood and stared at him. Then she looked down at the scissors like she didn't even know she had them in her hand. After a minute she got down on her hands and knees to look at him up close. She put her ear on his chest, and when she got up she just started walking round and round the room. I could hear her whispering, "Oh God oh God oh God."

I stayed scrunched up tight. I didn't hardly breathe because I knew I'd get a whipping for sure if she found me. Pretty soon she stopped whispering. I heard her go outside and back our old car up to the door. When she came back inside, she turned off all the lights. I couldn't see anything after that, but I heard something dragging across the floor and out the door. Then the car drove away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I lit out for my room as soon as I was sure they were gone. It was starting to get light outside when Mama finally came back. Charlie wasn't with her. I figured he must have been real mad when he came to and found out Mama had knocked him cold. He probably wasn't ever coming back, and I wasn't one bit sorry.

The next day Mama stayed home from work. She walked all over the house, looking, like she wanted to make sure Charlie hadn't left anything. She even lifted Grandma Budroe's tablecloth to peek under the table, and there were my paper dolls where I'd forgot and left them the night before.

Mama gave me a funny look; then she came over to me and grabbed my arm.

"Teeny Ann, how'd those paper dolls get under that table?"

She looked so mean that she scared me. I didn't think it was bad to play under there, but sometimes I can't tell what Mama thinks is bad. Besides, I didn't want her to know about my secret place.

"I don't know, Mama," I said. "I must've put them on the table and they fell under there."

She looked at the table, then looked back at me. Mama's eyes get skinny when she's mad. She was hurting my arm where she'd grabbed me.

"You don't get under there, do you? When you're not supposed to?"

I said, "No, Mama. It's probably hot under there. And dark."

She grabbed my arm tighter and shook it. "Was you under there last night?"

I was really scared by then. I said, "I told you no! I've never been under there. I'll go pick up my paper dolls. I'm sorry they fell down."

She let me go, but she still looked mean. That's been a lot of days ago, but she still isn't back to the way she was before Charlie came. She drinks a lot more beer now and she never laughs. She doesn't go out to do the town anymore—just comes home from Woolworth's at night, sits in the kitchen, and drinks beer.

A few days back two men came to our house. I saw them drive up—their car had POLICE written on its side. When Mama saw them she jumped up. She told me to go to my room and I'd better not make a sound. I heard the men talking to her, but I couldn't make out what they said.

After they left and she came back into the kitchen, I opened my door. "Who was that, Mama?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My heart was going bump bump. I hoped Daddy had saved up enough money for the lawyer and the policemen were going to take me home.

"Nobody," Mama said. She was drinking beer fast.

I went into the living room and started laying out my paper dolls. Every time I looked up, Mama was watching me.

"Teeny Ann," she finally said, real quiet, "how come you never asked where Charlie went?"

I didn't care about Charlie. I thought Daddy had found me again, but it looked like he hadn't.

"I just guessed he found someplace else to live," I told her.

She didn't say anything for a long time. Then she laughed, just the way she used to. "Yeah, he did."

Mama didn't talk about Charlie again, but she's still not acting right. She watches me, and she gets looks on her face like she's trying to figure something out. Two different times I saw her lift up Grandma Budroe's tablecloth and check under the table. I thought she was looking to see if I'd been bad, but I only play there while she's at Woolworth's now, and I make sure I pick everything up when I'm done.

Then, last night, I was eating a sandwich and cutting out paper dolls. I was using Mama's sewing scissors, and when she walked by and saw me she reached over and smacked me in the face.

"What are you doing with those scissors? Didn't I tell you not to use those scissors on paper?"

She grabbed them away from me. Her face looked so funny I couldn't tell if it was mean or scared.

I rubbed where she hit me. I couldn't figure out what I'd done bad. She never told me not to use her scissors. I always cut paper dolls with them because they're so nice and sharp. It made me a little mad.

Mama didn't talk to me anymore after that. I got into bed and all I could think about was Daddy. I sure hoped he would hurry and come find me right away.

I woke up all of a sudden. The moon was shining bright through the window and Mama was standing right beside my bed. I could smell beer all over the room, like she'd been standing there a long time. She was leaning over me, hugging a pillow to her chest, and her eyes looked black and shiny as marbles. When I looked up at her, her eyes got skinny. She said, "Teeny Ann, what do you know?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She said it in a kind of whisper, so I whispered back, "What're you doin', Mama? Know about what?"

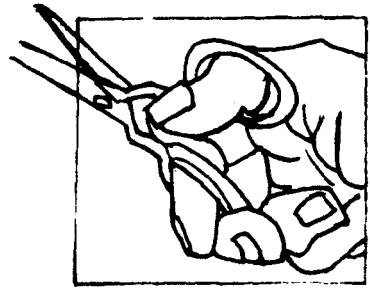
We sounded so funny, whispering like someone else was around, that I giggled. Mama straightened up quick and stared at me. She said, "Oh God." She rubbed her head like it was hurting her, then she turned around and ran right out of the room. I heard her bump into the kitchen table, then she went outside to the car and drove away. She's not back yet and it's almost time for breakfast. I didn't go back to sleep at all, just tried to understand why she's acting so funny.

So I've been thinking about things. Mama's beginning to make me mad. I don't want to live with her anymore. I want to go be with Daddy. All Mama does is take me away from him and my friends. She won't let me go to school and show everyone how good I can spell, I can't even go outside and play. She treats me mean when I haven't done anything, like when she locked me in the bathroom with all those bugs.

And she keeps calling me Teeny Ann when I told her I don't like it! I just wish she'd go away.

So I'm getting real mad. Maybe I've got a bad temper too. I cut out paper dolls with her scissors today, and I'm sitting here in my secret place—I don't even care if she doesn't want me to. When she comes home I'm going to make sure she hears me under here. Then, when she leans down and lifts up Grandma Budroe's tablecloth, I'm going to sock her in the neck with the scissors.

I'm little, but I'm strong. That made Charlie go away. Maybe it'll make Mama go away too.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Publishers Weekly *said of Christine Green's first novel,* Deadly Errand *(Walker & Company, 1992): "Fine writing and skillfully drawn characters abound." Ms. Green makes her debut here in the short-story form, with a piece that demonstrates her strengths. . . .*

DRUMMOND STREET

by CHRISTINE GREEN

The day the man from the water board went missing in Drummond Street was hot and humid. The washing on the lines hung still and dogs lay sleeping in the yards of the back-to-back houses. It was "factory fortnight" and the local factories in Grindle had shut down for the annual holiday in late July.

Some of the younger people in Drummond Street had gone on holiday to Blackpool or Scarborough or even Majorca. The pensioners or the keen gardeners or those too poor to go on holiday had stayed at home.

Three people at the top end of the street had seen the water board man. He was warning them that the water would be off for two hours in the morning the following day.

He hadn't been seen again, not in Drummond Street or any other street. His wife reported him missing at six o'clock that evening.

"He'll have gone for a drink in the pub, a hot day like today," said the desk sergeant at Grindle police station, trying to be reassuring and kind.

"He doesn't drink," said the wife. And then she rang every hour on the hour until at ten P.M. the Sergeant asked the CID to send someone along to see the wife as he couldn't spare a uniformed man.

Inspector Keith Lomloch agreed to go. He knew Drummond Street quite well and he was bored. Crime in factory fortnight had reached an all-time low. Even a missing water board man would break the tedium of an evening spent in a stuffy office.

The desk sergeant told him that a senior official from the water board, Alan Wickersley, had been along to Drummond Street at

© *1992 by Christine Green.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about three, and only three houses seemed to have been visited. Drummond Street had been his last visit of the day.

Lomloch walked the short distance towards Jubilee Road and the home of the missing man. It was dark now but the air was still and humid. From the front gardens of the houses the scent of roses and honeysuckle lingered as if trapped in the unmoving air. A few people watched as he walked by and they smiled at him as they interrupted their neighbourly chats about the good weather and how on such a day they would have liked to feel a sea breeze. Occasionally he heard the clink of milk bottles being put on steps, the cry of a fractious child, televisions seeming louder than usual because windows were wide open. At number twenty-one he stopped. A woman had opened the curtains. She had been waiting for him. Lomloch suddenly wished he could just keep on walking.

The wife, whose name was Gillian, was anxious, but adamant that disaster had befallen her husband.

"We've been married sixteen years. He's never been late before."

"Never?" asked Lomloch. He was always late.

"Never," repeated Mrs. Wickersley firmly.

"You hadn't had a row or anything?"

Gillian Wickersley fixed him with a baleful glare. "You sit down, Inspector," she said. "Your men are out looking for him aren't they?"

"Of course they are," he lied. Missing adult persons usually rated only one visit from a uniformed constable and after that the case would be off-loaded to the Salvation Army.

He sat down on a well-worn armchair and watched Gillian Wickersley. She was, he supposed, about thirty-five, the sort of age that in women's magazines was portrayed as being glamorous and dynamic. In Grindle, a woman of thirty-five was neither—they were "getting on." Gillian had streaks of grey in her hair, her body was thin and formless, and around her reddened eyes lines had etched themselves in, as though little creatures had burrowed there. Lomloch considered himself a good judge of women. She had probably been pretty, once.

"Tell me about your husband," he said.

Her hands nervously smoothed the material of the flowered apron she wore. "What do you want to know?" she asked, looking up swiftly in irritation.

"Now come on love," said Lomloch, "I'm trying to help. Tell me what he's like."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Like?" she echoed. "Well he's—he's just ordinary. Not very tall, fair crinkly sort of hair, blue eyes."

"Any enemies?"

"He works for the water board," she said incredulously.

"Drink? Gambling? Women? Drugs? Men?" queried Lomloch getting just about every vice out of the way.

Mrs. Wickersley was stunned into painful silence. "Look here, Inspector," she said eventually. "We're just ordinary folk. We've got two kids. My husband's only interests are his family and football. We go out together every Saturday night, my mum stays with the children, and usually we go to the sports club. We're just ordinary."

"And your husband wasn't depressed or worried about money?"

"We're not in debt, if that's what you mean. We don't run a car and the house is nearly paid for. And I'm careful with money. We manage very well."

Lomloch was beginning to feel he wasn't just barking up the wrong tree, he was in an entirely different forest.

"Is there anyone he could have decided to visit?"

"Not without telling me. He'd promised to take Jason to the park tonight to play cricket. He always keeps his promises." Her voice broke and tears welled in her eyes.

"I've rung the local hospitals," she said. "I've rung everybody I could think of."

Lomloch felt awkward. He murmured something about grown men not disappearing unless they wanted to. And then was ashamed of himself when she began crying in earnest. He had definitely said the wrong thing.

"Now then Mrs. Wickersley, stop crying," he blustered, as he stood up and patted her on the shoulder. "We'll find him, I promise you that. There's probably a very simple explanation."

She sniffed, grabbed a tissue from a box on the arm of the sofa and said, "Which is?"

"What I mean is—well . . ." Lomloch trailed off. "I've said we'll find him and we will."

With a hand to her mouth, as though trying to stifle more tears, she nodded.

Lomloch promised to return as soon as he had any news. He urged her to get some rest and asked if she'd like her mother informed.

"Not yet," she said. "Not yet."

He took with him a recent photograph. A smiling man, slightly built, the sort of face that stays boyish.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As Lomloch walked the short distance to Drummond Street he sensed that this wasn't going to be an easy case. Idly he went over the possibilities in his mind. Alan, bored with Saturday nights in the sports club and his dull but worthy wife, had done the proverbial "runner." Or he had succumbed to the charms of a bored but sexy housewife and had fallen asleep in her scented arms after a few stolen hours of passion. Or maybe he had a head injury and was wandering around Grindle with loss of memory. Perhaps little green men from Mars had landed on a bit of waste-ground and the only humanoid specimen they could find in the holiday fortnight was poor old Alan. Or he could be dead. Murdered even.

All was quiet in Drummond Street. One streetlamp lit the alley between the backs off the two-up two-down terraced houses. On the worn cobbles a cat lay sleeping by a gate. Alan Wickersley's last calls of the day had been here, according to both his wife and his employers. The cat barred the way to the first back gate. Lomloch watched the cat for a moment.

"Did you see him, puss?" he asked. The cat, sensing someone was there, woke and rubbed his head against Lomloch's trousers. Then he settled happily on his shoe. Lomloch moved the cat from his foot and lifted the latch of the back gate of the first house. He knocked firmly on the door, too firmly. The piercing screams of a baby rent the still of the night. When the door finally opened it was swung open as if in a fury and a young woman stood there with an angry expression and a "you bastard" on her lips. Lomloch guessed she was about eighteen, her cheeks still childlike, soft and rounded but with adult dark rings under her brown eyes.

"I thought you were someone else," she said. "What do you want at this time of night? You've just woken the baby, poor little bugger's teething."

"Police."

"Oh," she said, not the least surprised. "What's he been up to this time?"

There was a momentary pause in the child's screaming but it soon resumed more loudly. He or she had simply paused for breath. Lomloch raised his voice to be heard over the noise.

"Nothing that I know of—yet. Unless, that is, he's had something to do with a missing person."

She smiled, relieved. "Come on in then. If it was a missing car radio or a video that might be him, but he hasn't gone in for kidnap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ping yet. I mean he couldn't come and tell me a person had fallen off the back of a lorry, could he?"

As Lomloch stepped into the kitchen the warmth hit him. The room felt stifling. A cigarette lay burning in an ashtray, a romantic novel open on the table. In the air a smell lingered; he recognised it, the smell of wet nappies and baby powder. Strangely it wasn't unpleasant. He sat down at the table as the young woman went upstairs to the baby. The child quietened after a minute or two. Lomloch flicked the book over. The hero was speaking through gritted teeth, the heroine was biting her lips and trying to control her "fast-beating heart" and the "uncontrollable waves of desire that swept through her." The hero was saying hoarsely: "My darling, my darling, if only, if only . . ." Lomloch was just about to turn the page to find the answer to the "if only" riddle when the young mother returned with her baby in her arms.

The baby, large with tubularly fat legs, had the bright red spots on his cheeks that Lomloch recognised as evidence of teething. The child was sighing now with exhaustion, strands of black hair plastered to its head with sweat, beads of moisture on the forehead.

"Boy or girl?" he asked. The child began to wriggle in agitation, the nappy sagging and obviously wet.

"She's Tammy. She's fifteen months, she's nearly walking. She's ever so hot, you don't think she's got a bug or anything, do you? I mean she could be ill couldn't she? She's been whining all day."

"She's a lovely baby. I should think it's just the heat. Or perhaps she's thirsty."

"Yeah," said the girl. "I'll give her some juice."

Lomloch watched as the baby gulped on a bottle of cherry-coloured liquid. He liked babies. They were uncomplicated, they didn't cheat, lie, or murder. And a baby's smile could lift the heaviest heart.

The young mother's name was Samantha, Sam for short. She lived with Darren, on and off, and lately it had been more off than on. Lomloch told her about the missing man from the water board.

"Yeah. I saw him," said Sam. The baby gulped the last few drops from the bottle and then closed her eyes in a sort of exhausted ecstasy.

"He was a nice bloke. I hadn't seen him around here before."

"Did he say where he was going next?"

"He said he was doing all the houses in the street. Warning about the cut off."

"Did you see where he went when he left?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sam shook her black ponytail. "No. Tammy was whining and I tried putting her in her push-chair and rocking her. You know, backwards and forwards. Dead boring but sometimes it works."

Lomloch nodded. "Thanks for your help, Sam."

"That's all right," said Sam. "Shame he's missing. I was reading my horoscope when he came. We had a little chat about that. He said his horoscope was good for the day. It said 'Good luck will come your way like a bolt from the blue.' You can't believe these things can you?"

"Have to take horoscopes with a pinch of salt," said Lomloch.

"You got kids?" asked Sam.

Lomloch shook his head.

"It's all right for men," said Sam as she wiped the baby's forehead with a tissue. "They do all the playing and get all the gurgles and smiles, and then at three in the morning they tell you it's *your* kid that's screaming. Does the missing bloke have kids?"

"Two."

"There you are then. Hot day, hot night. Perhaps he'd just had enough. He's gone off somewhere, like Darren does when the crying gets him down. Perhaps he's gone to the seaside. I haven't seen the sea in years. I did go to Blackpool for a whole week. It was great. It only rained twice. One day I'll go again, when Tammy's old enough for a bucket and spade."

When Lomloch left, Tammy was asleep in Sam's arms, the wet nappy still in place. As he closed the back door Sam had sat down and resumed her reading. Romance between the covers of a book was the most a young mother could expect in Grindle, and that thought depressed Lomloch. He could have sunk two pints easily. That was *his* escape.

The back gate of the next house was painted a dull green, or at least it had been painted once. Long ago. Now the wood was exposed and the paint had shrivelled in places, and he had to lift the gate to open it; and even then it was so mishung and warped that it grated open rather than swung. He had to knock on the back door and call "Police" three times before it finally opened.

An elderly lady, white hair covered by a hairnet and wearing a red quilted dressing gown said: "Yes, pet. What is it?"

"I'm Police Inspector Lomloch. I'm trying to trace a missing water board official. Drummond Street was his last call of the day and as yet he hasn't returned home."

"You'd better come in. Have you got your warrant card?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lomloch smiled. "Good for you, Mrs. . . . ?" he said as he showed her his identification.

"Mrs. Armsby I am, and you can't be too careful these days, can you?"

Lomloch followed her into a tiny back room that smelt of stewed lamb and cabbage and had a budgie on a stand in one corner.

"Sit down, pet. Would you like a cup of tea?"

Lomloch declined. He was a lager man.

"Did you see the water board man this afternoon, Mrs. Armsby?"

"I did indeed," she said as she sat down on the upright armchair opposite his. "Nice young man. He had a glass of pop while he was here. He came to tell me the water was going off in the morning and I should make sure to fill a kettle."

"Did he come in the house?"

She shook her head. "I was sitting out in the garden for a few minutes. I brought his drink out to him."

"I see," said Lomloch, feeling dispirited and not really knowing what else to ask.

"We had a nice chat," she continued. "He said he was taking his little son to the park in the evening to play cricket. He said he hoped it would be cooler by then."

"What time was this?"

"About threeish I think. I'd long since had some dinner and a cup of tea and I was sitting in the garden resting my legs, ever so painful they get in hot weather."

"So he seemed perfectly normal?"

"Oh yes. As I said, he was a nice young man. Such a shame he's missing. His poor wife and children. No one's safe these days are they, even grown men."

"You didn't see anything unusual? Anyone strange hanging about?"

"Well, no, pet. Once that back gate's closed I don't go out again. I do my shopping in the morning and then that's it. I don't venture out again."

"And you didn't hear anything?"

Mrs. Armsby started to shake her head but then she said, "All I heard was Ronald Brace. 'Leeky' they call him. He shouts at the kids as they come up and down the alley on their bikes. I heard him shout once, otherwise it was quieter than usual."

"Where does Mr. Brace live?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Next door but on the other side. Nice man, a retired miner. Grows leeks. Bachelor he is. Never married. Just as well because he doesn't like kids much. Still, if he's poorly I keep an eye on him. Us old ones have to look after each other, don't we?"

Lomloch nodded in agreement and thanked her.

"I do hope you find him," she said, "and call again any time. I don't see many people. It's always nice to have visitors."

The next house was in darkness and there was no reply to his insistent knocking. Either they were still out or on holiday, and he realised he should have asked Mrs. Armsby who in the street was away. Still, it was slightly better than being in a stuffy office, he consoled himself as he continued up Drummond Street.

Only a few houses were occupied and no one had seen Alan Wickersley. Lomloch had been to the top of the alley and now came down the other side. It would have been more sensible to crisscross but it was growing cooler now and he didn't mind prolonging his search. He was off duty at midnight.

Mr. Ronald Brace was in his backyard when Lomloch opened the gate. He looked up startled. He was grey-haired and balding with his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, but his arms looked strong and his shoulders were broad. In front of him was a wheelbarrow full of gardening tools and by the side of the barrow two tin watering cans.

Lomloch introduced himself and explained his mission.

"Missing you say," said Brace. "I haven't seen no water board man. Well, only the one that came this evening."

"You're sure?" persisted Lomloch.

"Aye."

"Did you see anyone about three this afternoon?"

"Only kids."

"Were you in the whole afternoon, Mr. Brace?"

Brace paused for a moment resting a hand on his wheelbarrow.

"I went to my allotment about four. Collected my tools. I allus do that. Kids get into my shed and pinch them."

"I hear you grow leeks," said Lomloch.

"You hear right," said Brace. "I've won the Grindle leek-growing competition three years in a row. Champion, my leeks are. Champion."

Lomloch stood awkwardly for a moment saying nothing. The little green men from Mars were beginning to look like a real possibility. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I can't stand around here," said Brace. "Water's off in the morning. I've to fill me watering cans and water the leeks."

"Now?"

"Aye. When it's cool is the best time. I allus do it late. A couple of nights before the showing I sleep in my shed. Just in case the kids come and steal my leeks. I've been right busy in my allotment just lately. Competition's real stiff this year. The younger ones are getting keen as mustard. Mind you I'm the one with the experience and the knowledge. I look after my leeks like babies. Just like babies."

"Do the local kids give you much trouble?" asked Lomloch, aware that now they had a "community" policeman he could be asked to keep an eye on the allotments.

"Nothing I can't handle," answered Brace. "Only one little bastard gave me any trouble. Fair-haired kid in a blue tracksuit. Got a face like a ferret."

Lomloch smiled. "I'll be off then. Good luck with the leeks."

The Brace house was the last, or at least the last to have an occupant. Lomloch felt a wave of disappointment. He would have to tell Gillian Wickersley the bad news, but carefully. He must neither be too pessimistic nor too optimistic. Men had gone missing before. Out to buy a packet of cigarettes never to return. The British police forces had never managed to find Lord Lucan let alone a lowly water board man.

Back at the Police Station Lomloch was informed by the desk sergeant that Mrs. Wickersley had rung again and was getting more frantic.

Lomloch went to his office, poured himself a can of lager and listened as Grindle's town hall clock struck the hour. It was midnight. Midnight! It hadn't taken him long to walk from Drummond Street to the station. Surely no one waters their leeks at nearly midnight, not even someone as obsessed with leeks as Ronald Brace. There's nowt as queer as folk, Lomloch told himself, but that didn't quell his doubts. Not suspicious by nature, he had, over the years, made a conscious effort to be more suspicious and less trusting. Where a doubt or a niggle existed in his mind it had to be exorcised. There was one other thing that troubled Lomloch. Brace had used the past tense when he talked about the boy. "Only one little bastard gave me any trouble." What did that mean? Was it significant? There was only one way to find out.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At the allotment Brace sat in the darkness outside his shed on a stool. The leeks growing in the patch in front of him glistened with droplets of water, their tall leaves proud and strong.

"Champion," muttered Brace.

"Magnificent," said Lomloch as he walked up and stood beside him.

"They're a miracle," said Brace. "When I was working it was growing leeks that kept me sane. Planning and reading and getting tips from other growers. I allus wanted to be a farmer. Out in the fresh air every day. Not spend half my life in a dark hell."

"About the water board man . . ."

"Aye," said Brace staring sadly at Lomloch for a few moments, and as he did so his eyes began to glisten like the water droplets on the leeks. "He's here."

"What happened?"

"It was the kid's fault. He used to come up here shouting and jeering. Said he'd get my leeks. Sometimes he'd bring his friends and I'd chase them off. 'We'll be back, you stupid old sod,' they'd shout. If there was no one else working the allotments I'd have to stay all day in the growing season. And all night. You get too old for all that worry, you know. I complained to his mum of course, but she said he didn't mean no harm and he was a good boy really. But he was always here watching me if you know what I mean . . ."

"And the water board man?"

"I was in my backyard, see, and the gate opened. I keep it locked because of the kid, a bolt at the top. This hand comes over and slides back the bolt. Then I saw the fair hair and a flash of blue and I thought, It's him the little so and so, and I had a hammer in my hand, I'd been fixing the fence, and I whacked him over the head just the once as his head came through the gate. Had to protect my babies, you see. But when I looked at him properly, I knew it wasn't him. It wasn't the boy. I dragged him into the kitchen and then I had to wait until it was dark to bring him here in the wheelbarrow."

"What were you going to do with him?" asked Lomloch. His stomach had begun to churn at the thought of telling Mrs. Wickersley.

"Keep him in the shed for a bit, I thought, and then after the leek show I could have buried him. Mind you it would have ruined next year's leeks." He paused, looking out towards his crop. "How did you know it was me?"

"I didn't. Not really. I just thought the late watering was a bit suspicious. And I wondered if you were using a hosepipe. That's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

illegal in a drought. I thought perhaps you and the water board hadn't seen eye to eye about that. Maybe a row had ensued. A fatal row."

Brace didn't say anything for a moment.

"I'll go to prison, won't I?"

Lomloch nodded.

"Will I get bail?"

"You might."

"I could still make the show then?"

Lomloch didn't answer.

"You'd better open the shed now, Mr. Brace."

Alan Wickersley sat propped against the shed's wooden side. Lomloch shone his torch onto the face. Blood had dribbled from his head down the side of his cheek. He still looked young. Only a few grey hairs glinted at his temples. His royal blue water board uniform was hardly creased.

Lomloch sighed deeply before using his radio.

After Brace's arrest he called at Jubilee Road to break the news to Gillian Wickersley. He stood on the doorstep, his hand raised, momentarily trying to work out exactly what he was going to say.

She knew immediately he had bad news. Lomloch didn't go into details. That could wait until the morning. He simply told her Alan was dead with a head injury. Although she paled and sat with her head in her hands, she didn't cry.

"I knew he hadn't deserted me," she said. "I knew he'd come home if he could."

Lomloch asked if he could ring anyone to sit with her. She refused.

"I'll be all right," she said. "My Paul's out looking for his dad. I told him not to be long."

"Paul?" queried Lomloch.

"My eldest. He's fifteen. We had a big gap between him and Jason. Jason's only six."

"I'll wait till he comes home" said Lomloch.

They sat in silence for a while. Gillian stared at the blank television screen. Staring, as though she was viewing in her imagination either her past life or some lonely scary future.

Their eyes turned to the door when they heard the click-click of bike wheels. The front door opened and closed and then the living-room door opened just slightly. A head appeared. Fair crinkly sort of hair, a face like a ferret.

"I couldn't find him Mum," he said. "I'm going to bed." And in a flash of blue, he was gone. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

In a tradition dating back at least to the dime novels and pulp magazines, writers of popular fiction often work in more than one category. Many contemporary mystery writers also produce westerns, for example—Bill Pronzini, Ed Gorman, Bill Crider, Loren D. Estleman, James M. Reasoner, Robert J. Randisi, and L. J. Washburn spring to mind. Richard Matheson, whose versatile talent is almost legendary among his fellow pros, has written suspense fiction, the novelette "Duel" being a prominent example, along with his best-known work in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. His first western, the Spur-Award-winning *Journal of the Gun Years* (1991, recently reprinted by Berkley at $4.50), is an extraordinary achievement that can be recommended to discerning fiction readers regardless of genre.

The crossover of mystery and science fiction writers is considerable, a few of the most prominent examples being Poul Anderson, Fredric Brown, and the late Isaac Asimov. One prolific writer with a foot in both camps was s.f. pioneer Murray Leinster, who wrote a series of interplanetary medical mysteries featuring Med Service officer Calhoun and his constant companion, Murgatroyd the tormal, an endearing furry animal who has uses beyond serving as a pet: he can create antibodies to fight off any disease. *Quarantine World* (Carroll & Graf) brings together three novelettes previously collected as *S.O.S. From Three Worlds* (originally published between 1959 and 1966) and *The Mutant Weapon* (1959), a short-ish novel seemingly padded out from the same length as its companions. The stories are cleverly crafted hard s.f., but they wouldn't be nearly as effective without Murgatroyd. Closer to a standard whodunit is *Brain Twister* (Carroll & Graf, $3.95), a 1962 entry from a brief but inventive series by Randall Garrett and Laurence M. Janifer, originally published as by Mark Phillips. In 1971, FBI agent Kenneth J. Malone must find a telepathic spy picking up on American space-science secrets. This one, too, is expanded from a magazine story, but the cleverness of the fairly-clued puzzle makes the occasional padding and some rather strained facetiousness in the narrative worth tolerating. The story is very much in the style of a prominent 1940s mystery writer. (For a clue to which one, see the name of the main character.)

A science-fictional concept sometimes explored by mystery writers is the parallel world or "what if" situation, where history is rewritten on the premise that some key event occurred differently. Len Deighton depicted a World-War-II Britain occupied by the Nazis in *XX-GB*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(1979). In a recent British best-seller, another writer has carried a similar idea a step further: what if Hitler won the war and was around to celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday in 1964?

**** Robert Harris: *Fatherland,* Random, $21. Given the premise, which is extrapolated masterfully against the background of a Berlin rebuilt by Albert Speer, this very effective first novel follows a fairly standard pattern of the political paranoia thriller, as decent cop Xavier Marsh comes to discover the Nazis' darkest secret, one that (as victors) they have managed to conceal over the years. (Skip the jacket copy: it tips one of the novel's cleverest historical surprises.)

*** Kate Wilhelm: *Naming the Flowers,* Axolotl/Pulphouse, Box 1227, Eugene, OR 97440; $10. The author is best-known for s.f. (though she has plenty of mystery credentials, too); the title and cover suggest a romance; and the blurb emphasizes crime and suspense. Short as it is at eighty-six pages, this crisp and readable novella embodies all of the above. Jaded publisher Winston Seton is at odds with the FBI over the well-being of a little girl he meets on an Atlantic City beach. Is she a millionaire's vanished granddaughter? And why does she seem to age at a mysteriously accelerated rate? This collector's item is published in a 900-copy signed limited edition. (Price above is for the trade paperback, with hardcover ⟨$35⟩ and leather-bound ⟨$65⟩ editions also available to collectors.)

**** Lindsey Davis: *Venus in Copper,* Crown, $19. In his third case, Ancient Roman informer (i.e. private eye) Marcus Didius Falco is asked by the female members of a non-blood-related family of freed slaves to investigate the fiancée of the one single male: her last three marriages have been shortened by sudden death of the husbands. Though some of the slang and other modern terminology may occasionally jar, the novel is well-plotted, well-peopled, and exceedingly well-told. The background is captured brilliantly, with more view of the underside of Roman society than provided in most other Roman detective novels: we first meet Falco viewing the rats in jail.

**** Grif Stockley: *Probable Cause,* Simon and Schuster, $20. Arkansas lawyer Gideon Page, who previously appeared in the author's *Expert Testimony,* is laid off by his firm and goes it alone, his first case being the defense of a black psychologist accused first of manslaughter, then of murder in the electrocution death of a severely retarded teenager. Apart from some fine trial scenes, Stockley offers a painfully believable picture of the likable Page's relationship with his daughter and an unusually complex depiction of race relations in the contemporary South.

**** Michael Collins: *Crime, Punishment and Resurrection,* Fine, $19.95. This stunning collection of eight short stories (seven previously published) and a new novella, all about Dan Fortune, demonstrates why Collins is one of the giants of private-eye fiction. The kind of puzzle-spinning mind that can create a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

locked-room mystery like "Who?" coexists quite nicely with an uncompromising and unapologetic social conscience that relishes swimming against the prevailing tide. The longest piece, "Resurrection," is unusual among the many P.I. mysteries about crazy cults in its very serious exploration of religion.

*** Paco Ignacio Taibo II: *Some Clouds,* translated from the Spanish by William I. Neuman, Viking, $19. Taibo is another P.I. writer with social and political points to make. This very short novel is his second (of many, I hope) about Mexico City's Hector Belascoaran Shayne to appear in English. Much as I'd love to comment on the irony of the conclusion and its uniqueness in detective-story annals, the rules of mystery reviewing forbid. (Puzzle for buffs: To what extent is Taibo doing a homage to Brett Halliday and Michael Shayne? Two similarities strike me aside from the obvious commonality of surnames: 1) Hector, like Halliday, wears an eyepatch; and 2) Taibo, like Halliday, makes himself a character in the story.)

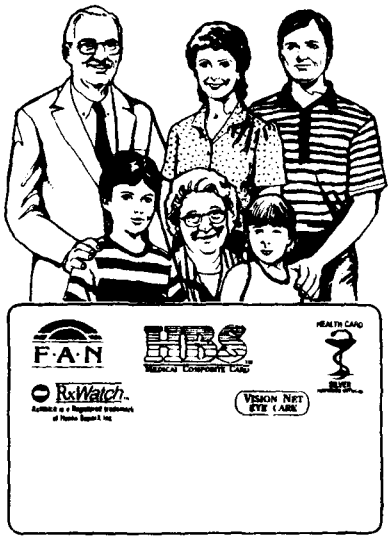
** Thomas Chastain: *The Prosecutor,* Morrow, $20. Besides continuing the Perry Mason series, Chastain has followed Erle Stanley Gardner's lead in adding a D.A. to his stable of characters. The first book about Anne Gillman seems written with the small screen in mind, packing a miniseries's quotient of plot lines and characters into less than 150 pages. The author has done much better, but he produces some good twists and a hometowner's evocation of New York.

** Sheryl Lynn: *Double Vision,* Harlequin, $2.89. No sooner has Texas copy service employee Kerry Byfield's eyewitness testimony gotten William Abernathy convicted of killing his wife than she finds herself involved with incredibly charismatic private eye Tarkington Smith, who is trying to clear his old friend. The road to the solution involves much manipulation of computers. Harlequins get a bad rap, to a degree unjustified. While it's true the carefully spaced romantic passages seem formulaic, and the characters are a bit too clearly divided into good guys and bad guys, the storytelling is soundly professional.

Lawrence Treat has joined with his brother-in-law Judge Norbert Ehrenfreund to produce *You're the Jury* (Holt, $9.95), a fact-based collection of twelve courtroom case studies with the reader invited to act as juror. Most of the cases are criminal, and some involve ethical/legal issues like religious deprogramming, assisted suicide, and capital punishment. Though it is directed at a young readership (thirteen and up), many adults will find the book both absorbing and educational. (Longevity note: Treat is the third author reviewed here this year, the others being Phyllis A. Whitney and David Abrahamsen, who was born in 1903!)

© 1992 by Jon L. Breen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



GUARANTEED LOWEST PRICES ON PRESCRIPTION DRUGS!

SAVE MINIMUM 15% ON LENSCRAFTERS VISION CARE!

SAVE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS ON MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND HOME HEALTH CARE PRODUCTS!

SAVE UP TO 60% ON HEARING AID SERVICES AND SUPPLIES

*Rx*Watch* is a registered trademark of Hook-SuperX, Inc.

ACUTE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS may be purchased at over 45,000 independent pharmacies nation-wide, including major chain stores (**eg; Hook-SuperX, Brooks, Wal-Mart, Walgreens, Thrifty, CVS, K-Mart Revco**, etc.).

- Brand name and generic drugs are priced at wholesale prices plus state Medicaid dispensing fee.

MAINTENANCE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS are provided by a nationally known mail order provider.

- Brand name and generic drugs are priced substantially below retail—guaranteed lowest prices on next refill;
- Home delivery;
- Prescriptions are checked by a minimum of two pharmacists under a program that is designed to control accuracy and dangerous drug interaction.
- Vision Care - Receive 15% minimum discounts on eye exams, glasses, frames, contact lenses, etc., at all Lenscrafters locations nationally.

As a member you can purchase **OVER 400,000 HOME MEDICAL SUPPLIES**, equipment, non-prescription medicines, and rentals representing over 400 manufacturers.

- Ambulatory Aids, Arthritic and Self-Help, Back and Cervical Aids, Bath and Toilet Aids, Bedroom and Bed Equipment, Health and Beauty Aids, Orthopedic and Sports Medicine, Ostomy Management, Respiratory, Urological, Wheelchairs, thousands more items;
- Savings of 20-50% below retail;
- Home delivery (5-6 days);
- **FREE** catalog;

As a member you can also purchase **HEARING AIDS**, hearing aid batteries, and hearing aid repairs at substantially discounted prices.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Access to 45,000 drug stores nationwide!
NO claim forms!
NO deductibles!
NO limits on usage!
NO pre-existing conditions excluded!

Our Guarantee

If you find a pharmacy that has a lower price for your maintenance drugs (90 day supply) call us. We'll verify that pharmacy's price and charge you that lower price on your next refill.

Enroll Today

To get your HBS Medical Composite Card, complete and mail this enrollment form to:
HBS, 2101 South Hamilton Road, Columbus, Ohio 43232
Your card and all membership information should arrive within 2 weeks.
Or call 614-864-8683 to place a credit card order.
Upon enrollment, HBS will notify each national supplier of your purchase eligibility. When you're ready to purchase or use any service, use the 800 number listed on the back of your membership card.

ONLY **$34.95** PER YEAR FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

DP-2
EQ132

YES! *I would like to enroll in the HBS Medical Composite Card Program. I am enclosing $34.95 for the first year's enrollment. I understand that this card covers me, my spouse and children.*

Your last name	Your first name	Middle init.	Date of Birth
Address			Social Security #
City	State	Zip	Phone
Spouse's last name	Spouse's first name	Middle init.	Date of Birth

DEPENDENT FAMILY MEMBERS TO BE COVERED

Last name	First Name	Middle init.	Date of Birth
Last name	First Name	Middle Init.	Date of Birth
Last name	First Name	Middle init.	Date of Birth

☐ Check enclosed (Please make your check payable to HBS.)

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard Card #_____ Exp._____

Complete and mail with payment to: HBS, 2101 South Hamilton Rd., Columbus, OH 43232

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a distinguished Christmas story by

ROBERTSON DAVIES

As in Christmas issues past, we include here a selection from High Spirits, *tales told by Robertson Davies at Christmas parties he attended at the University of Toronto . . .*

THE XEROX IN THE LOST ROOM

by ROBERTSON DAVIES

Those of you who have attended several of these Christmas parties are aware how extensively, indeed extravagantly, this college is haunted. Every year a ghost; sometimes more than one. I cannot explain how a new building in a new country—or a country that pretends it is new, although in reality it is very old—comes to be so afflicted with what our university sociologists call 'spectral density'. I suspect it has something to do with the concentration of our college community, senior and junior, on intellectual things. There is in nature a need for balance, a compensating principle which demands in our case that where there is too much rationality there should be occasional outbreaks of irrationality. I offer my explanation tentatively, because I am no philosopher and certainly no scientist, and detractors have said that rationality is a quality by which I am seldom overwhelmed.

It could also be that there is a housing shortage in the world beyond, just as there is here below. Everybody is aware of the alarming rate at which the world's population is increasing. In the lifetime of some of us it has very nearly doubled. More people and thus, inevitably, more ghosts. Where are they to put themselves? Many of them are emigrating from the lands of their origin and

From High Spirits *by Robertson Davies. Copyright © 1982 by Robertson Davies. Reprinted by arrangement with Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books U.S.A., Inc. and Penguin Books Canada, Ltd.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coming to Canada, which is still comparatively open, especially in the spiritual aspect of things. That may be the explanation.

Over the years our ghosts have tended to be from the upper ranks of the spirit world; it is an odd fact that the poor and humble rarely have ghosts. Celebrated people have haunted us; now and then we have bagged a spectral crowned head, but as a general thing our ghosts are drawn from the intelligentsia. I confess with shame that this has betrayed me into a measure of vanity. I catch myself wondering, early in January, Who will it be this year? And then I consult a list of anniversaries falling in the year to come. Ghosts, you know, are not always tied to the places where their earthly life was passed; now and then they are granted a freedom of movement which is called a Witches Sabbatical.

Last January I looked eagerly to see who would be on tour, so to speak, and my eye fell upon the name of Henrik Ibsen. It was the 150th anniversary of his birth, and all over the world a good deal of fuss was going to be made. Ibsen! My mouth watered. To be visited by that mighty dramatist, considered by so many people to be the greatest of his kind since Shakespeare—what a cultural *coup* that would be! Why would he visit us? Canada reflects the social world of Ibsen as much as any country in the world today. Surely he would come to Canada, if only to sneer. And, as you know, we contain within our walls the University's Centre for the Study of Drama, and I knew that Ibsen would be in their minds, and on their tongues. Surely the great man would favour us with a few morose words. But then I reproached myself. It is stupid to count your ghosts before they are manifested. Down, vanity! Down, worldly aspiration, I cried; and they downed. But not totally. From time to time I surprised, at the back of my mind, an unworthy hankering.

When December arrived, I was nervously aware that time was getting on. Henrik Ibsen was late. It was not like him. All through his life he was known for his punctiliousness about appointments. If he said he would do a thing, he would do it, especially if it were something disagreeable. But then I came to my senses; Ibsen had promised nothing; this whole business of his visit was a foolish whimwham of my own. You should be ashamed of yourself, I said; and I was obediently ashamed of myself. Nevertheless, deep in the undisciplined abyss of my mind, that hankering continued.

The resolution of the affair came, as it so often does, on the night of our College Dance. It has long been my custom, after the supper which is a feature of our dance, to go out into the quad and take a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

few turns up and down. It is then that I often see ghosts. Nothing to do with the supper, I assure you, because I never take anything but a cup of coffee. Perhaps it has something to do with the excitement of seeing this quiet place turned, for one evening, into a palace of delights. So, as I paced the familiar flagstones in the chill air, I was not surprised to see a stranger standing—lurking, to be more precise—in a dark corner.

My heart leapt within me. Was it he? The figure was slight for Henrik Ibsen who, as you know from his photographs, was built rather like a barrel encased in a frock coat. And the hat—where was the resplendent silk hat which was the great man's invariable outdoor wear? As I drew nearer it was plain that the figure was wrapped in a cloak, which, even in darkness, looked shabby. And the hat was quite wrong; it was a three-cornered hat. Unless Ibsen had chosen for some inexplicable reason to get himself up as a figure from the early eighteenth century, this was the wrong ghost. I was disappointed and annoyed and perhaps I spoke abruptly. What I said was "Well?" with that upward intonation that makes it clear that it is not at all well.

"If you please," said the ghost, "I am looking for a modest, dry lodging in quiet surroundings."

"This is an odd time to be looking for a room," said I. "You should come back in daylight," I added, nastily.

"Please don't be severe with me," said the ghost in such a pitiful tone that I felt ashamed of myself. "My need is very great, and I must find a place tonight, or terrible things will happen to me." He was almost weeping.

"I have no wish to be severe," said I, "but you must understand that this college has a purpose to fulfill in the university, and that purpose makes no provision for—"

"For people in my situation?" said the ghost. "But you are famous for your hospitality toward ghosts. Ah, but I see," he continued, "you are only interested in famous ghosts, and I am a sadly obscure person. That has been the pathos of my life. If I were not such a failure, I would use a stronger word than pathos; I would say tragedy."

Poor fellow! I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. Here I was, hankering after the ghost of a world-famous dramatist and behaving with abominable callousness to a poor phantom whose life had been a tragedy perhaps deeper than any Ibsen had conceived. Tears filled my eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I should have known better. Ghosts are all rampaging egotists—forces of egotism that refuse to accept death as a fact. The ghost before me was now fixing me with a baleful glare, and I felt its hand laid with icy firmness on my sleeve.

"List, list to me," said the ghost; "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood—"

"All right, all right," I said impatiently. "If you must—and believe me I know how communicative you ghosts can be—let me have it as briefly as possible, and without poetry. I'm very well up in *Hamlet*. Who are you?"

"That is my trouble," said the ghost. "I'm a private person, but not therefore utterly without poetry and feeling. In life I was that particular type of gentle person called a poor relation."

"Whose poor relation were you?" said I.

"A rich relation's, of course. He was a country squire in Gloucestershire. Not an ill-natured fellow. He knew I had no prospects and no luck, and he let me live in his manor house in a subordinate position, helping with the estate accounts, writing letters, teaching the children a little Latin, and sometimes drawing scale plans for his drainage projects, while he and the vicar were out shooting. You know the kind of things poor relations do. I had been something of a scholar, you see, and I had hoped for a college fellowship, but I had no influential friends; I had hoped to enter the church, but the bishop had too many nephews, and altogether I was a failure and a dependant. I didn't complain. Not very much, that is to say. But I was a cousin of the squire, and it irked me that the servants treated me so badly."

This was the sorriest excuse for a ghost I had ever met. Failure in the spirit world is particularly chilling, and I was beginning to shiver. But I couldn't break away. It would have been unfeeling.

"But you have apparently achieved some success after death," said I. "You are a ghost, and you are far from home. How have you got leave to travel?"

"That is the saddest part of my story," said he. "But you must hear me out. Don't bustle me."

I groaned, but I had not the heart to leave him.

"It came to a head this very night, two hundred and fifty years ago," said the ghost. "It was on December ninth, in 1728. Our good King George II had just entered the eleventh year of his reign—"

"Yes, yes," said I; "I know a little history myself. Do make haste."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What a fidget you are," said the ghost, rather sharply I thought for a poor relation. "Then hear me. My cousin, the squire and his lady had gone to Sudeley Castle, to a ball. I was not invited. Of course not. I was a nobody and I had no fine clothes. I was left at home without even a word of apology. Nor had any dinner been ordered. My cousin's wife, who was inclined to be mean, said that doubtless I could get something in the kitchen with the servants.

"That would not have been so bad, because the servants saw to it that they ate very well, but it meant that I had to brave my greatest enemy, the butler; he took every chance to make me feel my position as a poor relation. And that night he was particularly tyrannous, because he was drunk. We quarrelled. He killed me."

"Stabbed you?" I asked.

"No."

"Shot you? The great kitchen blunderbuss, kept above the chimney, loaded in case of burglars? In his drunken rage the butler tore it from its place and shot you while the womenfolk screamed?"

"You have been seeing too much television," said the ghost. "The eighteenth century wasn't like that at all."

I continued to be hopeful and romantic. "But the quarrel," I said; "he insulted you, spoke slightingly of your birth, and your good blood was aroused. You lunged at him with your sword, but lost your footing, and he seized the sword and stabbed you to the heart. Please say it was like that."

"I never owned a sword in my life," said the ghost. "Nasty, dangerous things. No: I'll tell you exactly how it was. I was rather drunk myself, you see, and we were having a dispute about how to make boot-blacking. I had complained that the blacking he used had too much brown sugar in it. You know, the secret of good boot-blacking is the proportion of brown sugar to the amount of soot and vinegar. It's the butler's work to make it. And I said he put in too much brown sugar. I said my boots were always sticky. He said I lied. I said he forgot himself in the presence of his betters. He said what betters, and I was no more than a servant myself and begged the squire's old wigs. Then I absent-mindedly picked up a table fork and stuck it into his right buttock. He must have had very soft flesh because it went much farther in than I had expected. Right up to the handle. Then he picked up a pewter tankard and hit me over the head, and to my surprise and indignation I fell to the floor, dead as a nit."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This was the lowest ghost I had ever been pestered by. A wearer of second-hand wigs! Brained in a kitchen brawl with a pewter pot! And he had the gall to haunt Massey College! Nevertheless, as a tale of low-life, this had its interest.

"What happened then?" I asked.

"That was the cream of the whole thing," said the ghost, as near to laughter as a ghost can get. "You see, as soon as the butler hit me with that pot, I found myself about nine inches above the ground, watching everything—myself stretched out on the floor, the cook trying to staunch the blood from my head with a towel, all the maids in hysterics, the footman saying he knew it would come to this some day, and the butler, as white as a sheet, blubbering: 'Oh zur, come back I beg 'ee. I never went fur to do it, zur. Come back, and I'll go light on the brown sugar as long as I live, indeed zur, I will.' But it was hopeless. I was gone, so far as they were concerned. The butler ran off and became a highwayman, but he was too fat and stupid for the work, and he was caught and hanged within a year.

"But there was one thing about the affair that was truly impressive. The cook was a wise woman, in her fashion, and before the butler ran off she begged him to taste my blood—just a little, just to dip his finger in it and lick it. He refused. She took a few licks herself, to show him that there was nothing really unpleasant about it, but of course she was professionally accustomed to tasting uncooked substances. Why? Because, you see, she knew that if he did that my ghost would never be able to appear. Now you remember that, if ever you kill anybody; swallow some of his blood, or you'll be sorry. But of course in these days so many murderers are careless and ignorant that what I am telling you has almost been forgotten. I have always been glad that butler was thoroughly stupid; otherwise my fine career, my real achievement, would have been impossible."

The ghost was markedly more cheerful, now. "Do you know, that was the best thing that ever happened to me? From being a poor relation, I was suddenly promoted to family ghost. My cousin and his wife were proud of me, and as succeeding generations appeared in the manor I became quite a celebrity. I was once investigated by the Society for Psychical Research, and Harry Price himself gave me the coveted three star rating: Accredited Spectre, First Class."

I continued to be patient, under difficulties. "But what brings you here?" I asked. A ghost from Gloucestershire with a nice little local reputation—what sent him travelling?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He groaned. All ghosts groan, and it is a very disquieting sound. This ghost was a first-rate groaner.

"You read the newspapers, I suppose?" he said.

"Unfailingly," I replied.

"Zena Cherry?" said he.

"Religiously," said I, and made the sign of the gossip columnist—one hand cupped to the ear, the other reaching for the pencil.

"Then surely you remember her account of the old English manor house that had been bought by a Toronto entrepreneur and rebuilt, stone by stone, in Don Mills, near the Bridle Path?"

I did remember it.

"It was, literally, an uprooting," said the ghost. "But I took it philosophically. The trouble with a ghost's situation, you see, is the sameness of it. After two hundred and fifty years I was beginning to feel housebound, and I thought a new country, new people to frighten, new people to boast about me, would be an adventure. So I didn't mind the move to Toronto; the journey by airline freight wasn't bad, in spite of the delays by strikes. But when I arrived at last, all sorts of terrible things began to happen."

"Climate unfavourable, I suppose?" said I, sympathetically.

"Not that, so much as the structural changes," said the ghost. "Our splendid old manor-house kitchen was thought too big for a Canadian dwelling. To begin, it was a good hundred and forty feet from the dining-room, and there was a flight of stone stairs on the way. You should have heard what the real-estate people had to say about that! And it had a flagstone floor, which was hard and cold to Canadian feet. Further, our house was a proper gentleman's residence, and without a butler and a footman and six maids and a cook and a scullion nothing more ambitious than sandwiches could be managed. So the real-estate people decided that an entirely new kitchen should be built, and the old kitchen should become something called a rumpus room, where the children of the family could be at a suitable distance from their elders. I gather that 'rumpus' is the modern word for what in my day was called hullabaloo.

"To accommodate the new kitchen, the contractor bought in England and transferred to Don Mills an object that would never be seen attached to a respectable manor. It was an oast-house. You know what an oast-house is?"

I didn't.

"It's a kiln for drying hops, a great tower-like building with a pointed roof. An unseemly object. But they stuck it to the side of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manor, right by the dining room, and put a modern kitchen in it.

"A modern kitchen is no place for a ghost. Crackling with electric current, cold things, and cramped so that one miserable servant can do the work of five. Where is the inglenook, where visiting grooms and coachmen can dry themselves in bad weather? Where is the cheerful fire, and the spit, the dogs, the cat and her kittens, the hens running in and out, the ducks peeping in at the door, and, in winter, the shadowy corners for haunting? But the worst thing of all was that the builders and the contractor couldn't get the name right, and they called the horrid thing an oaf-house. Who wants to haunt an oaf-house, I ask you? A poor relation I may have been, but an oaf—never!

"Nevertheless, I determined to make the best of it. All immigrants have a hard time in a new country, for a few hundred years. I decided to divide my time between the oaf-house, on the housekeeper's day off, and the rumpus room when the children weren't doing whatever children do in a rumpus room, which is something I never found out.

"Because, you see, the house didn't sell. Even with all the tinkering and destruction and costly misery and modern convenience it somehow failed to catch on. So the people who were trying to sell it hit on a great idea; they would let the public visit it.

"That was the end, for me. We phantoms have our feelings, and I never undertook to haunt wholesale, so to speak. Servants I will frighten—yes, gladly. Gentlefolk of my own kindred I will provide with the thrill of a true family phantom, though I have always drawn the line at manifesting myself to more than two at a time—usually a man and his wife or better still, somebody who ought to be his wife. But haunt I must. It is part of my condition of existence, you see. Unless I make an appearance at least once a year, I am in serious trouble with—well, never you mind who. But appearing to people who have paid admission on behalf of a charity—no, no, the thing is not to be thought of."

"I suppose a great many people visited the house?" said I. I knew what had happened, but I wanted to hear his version of it.

"They came by scores and hundreds," said he. "And what they did to our family manor beggars description, as Old Shakespeare says. They invited Toronto decorators to refurbish it, a room to each decorator, and the decorators themselves made my eyes start out of my head. They were men of an affected elegance—what in my day might have been called exquisites or beaux, except that these were not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gentlemen—they worked for their living, and what they sold was taste. As if anyone of any consequence ever had taste, or wanted any! They filled our comfortable old manor with spindly walnut and mahogany that might have done well enough in a fashionable bawdy-house in London, but was not to be compared with our comfortable old oak and chairs stuffed with the wool of our own sheep. They brought in pictures of people nobody had ever heard of, and declared they were by Sir Peter Lely and later masters. They stuck up curtains and threw down carpets of horrid gaudy colours, as if brown were not the only color a lady of good family would endure in her rooms. But there was worse to come, much worse.

"They did up some of the rooms in what they called 'contemporary taste' and that was Chaos and Old Night, I assure you. They papered the floors, and stuck fur to the walls, and hung pictures by madmen, and set out furniture in which even I, as a weightless spectre, could not have sat with any comfort. And when all this was done the procession of viewers appeared. They were the friends of the Women's Committees of the charities that were to be benefited by this dreadful rape of my dear old manor, and they tramped everywhere and poked into everything.

"They seemed to have no idea of the comforts of an eighteenth-century house, and so they admired all the po-boxes in the bedrooms and said what charming little bedside tables they were, and they admired the silver chamber-pot my cousin had kept in the dining-room sideboard, for his convenience after dinner, and to my shame it was kept in full sight, filled with flowers. They loved all the modern rooms because they reminded them of their own homes. Best of all they liked the new kitchen, and said how wonderful it was that an inconvenient old manor could be so elegantly adapted for really civilized living. There were blue-haired ladies who came in aid of the Art Gallery and there were ladies with hair of improbable shades who came in aid of the Ballet, and noisy stout ladies who were patrons of Opera, and there were garden ladies who came to see the dreadful tropical plants that the decorators called 'growies' which were stuck up everywhere—as if garden rubbish didn't belong outside a respectable gentleman's house."

"And you couldn't bear it?" said I, sympathetically.

"I could bear everything," said he, and I swear that if ever a ghost had tears in his eyes, it was at that moment. "Everything, that is, except the air-conditioning. Would you believe that they filled the fine old walls with metal guts that conveyed jets of air that stank

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of mice to every part of that dear old place—jets that squirted out where one least expected, blowing me about like a leaf in a storm and playing merry hell with my ectoplasm until I developed the worst case of phantom arthritis that has ever been seen at any of our Hallowe'en meetings. That was the finish. That settled the matter forever. I had to leave or I should have become a mere knotted bundle of malice, and would probably have dwindled into a Poltergeist of the lowest class. It was leave my home or lose countenance irreparably in the phantom world.

"So will you take me in? You are a modern foundation, I know, but your college has some of what I regard as the comforts of home. Draughts, mostly; I miss normal, healthy draughts more than you can imagine."

I pondered, and that is always fatal, for when I ponder my resolution leaks away. He was a humble creature, as ghosts go, but his story had gone to my heart. Still—where on earth was I to put him?

"I could make myself useful," he said, wistfully. "I have heard that a trade flourishes on this continent—that of a Ghost Writer, and I know a lot of writing is done here. Yourself, for instance. I know you write romances, and though I despise romances perhaps, in time, I could grind out a three-volume novel about an unfortunate young man who wanted to be a college fellow, and then wanted to take holy orders, but who was slain untimely in an affair of honour with an aristocratic adversary. I promise to put in lots of theology. You could sign it, of course."

"No," I said firmly, "that wouldn't do at all."

He looked very forlorn, and he seemed to grow more transparent as grief overcame him. "Could I copy manuscripts?" he pleaded.

I had a flash of illumination! Our Xerox machine in the college is terribly inadequate, and a copyist would be a great benefit to us—especially a copyist who was cheap.

But where was I to put him? I cudgelled my brains and then—another flash—I had the answer.

Years ago, when this college building was completed, the architect, Mr. Thom, presented me with a set of plans. I counted the rooms for occupation by junior fellows—and I paused. Then I went through the college with the bursar and we counted, and counted again, and however carefully we counted there were three rooms in the plan which could not be found in the building. I made enquiry of Mr. Thom. "Yes," he said, in the abstracted manner which is characteristic of architects, "when I had made all the alterations

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the founders called for, three rooms somehow got mislaid. Walls were moved, and jogs and corners were eliminated, and somehow or other three rooms disappeared. They are there, in a way, and yet in another way they aren't there."

Without a word, I led the ghost up to the top of staircase number three, until we confronted a blank wall. "Here is your room," said I; "I don't pretend that I can see it myself, but perhaps you can."

It was a risk on my part, and it worked. The ghost vanished through the wall, but I could hear his voice, and for the first time since we met, its tone was cheerful.

"Of course," he cried; "the very thing I've always wanted. Commodious, a charming view of the quad, several strong draughts, and no modern conveniences whatever. Bless you, sir, bless you."

I was rid of him, for the moment. I made a chalk mark on the wall where his door seemed to be. In a day or two I would hunt him up and instruct him in his new duties as an unseen and unrequited Xerox.

As I walked back through the quad with a light heart I suddenly saw—my heart leaped into my mouth—I suddenly saw a figure, familiar to me from a score of nineteenth-century photographs, standing near the gate, looking about him with an air of deep disapproval. That barrel-shaped body in the impeccable frock coat; that tall silk hat of surpassing splendour. It must be he! I was to be rewarded for my good deed! I rushed forward, my hand outstretched.

"Dr. Ibsen!" I cried; "you have come at last. Do stay a while! Do come inside! Have a glass of acquavit! Let us have a really splendid talk about your work! And will you honour me by inscribing my copy of your great drama, *Ghosts?*"

Ibsen—for indeed it was he—bent upon me a gaze that was like being transfixed by two little knives. His thin lips parted, and a single word escaped the prison-house of his formidable countenance.

"Tvertimot," said he, and without another word he vanished through the bars of our gate.

Tvertimot! Tvertimot—that supremely characteristic utterance had been the last word he spoke on his deathbed! I rushed into my study, dragged down my great Dictionary of the Norwegian Tongue and looked it up with trembling hands.

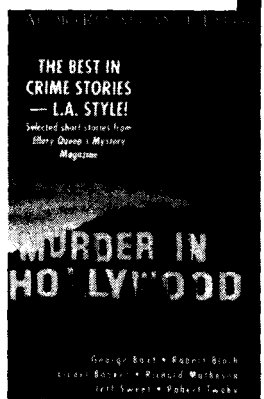
"Tvertimot," said the entry: "Quite the contrary, or colloquially, Not on your Nellie."

Well, I reflected, not a bad year for ghosts after all. We had acquired an additional Xerox, and Ibsen had dropped in for a sneer. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERY ON AUDIO!

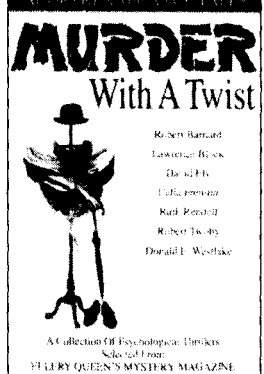
THE PERFECT GIFT FOR DIE-HARD FANS!



MURDER IN HOLLYWOOD

Lights! Camera! Murder! Six deadly tales from the dark side of Tinsel Town — where not all the blood comes from the special effects department.

2 tapes, 3 hours • $16.95



MURDER WITH A TWIST

Discover worlds where terror, madness and murder lie just beyond the borders of innocence. Six psychological thrillers from the masters of the genre.

2 tapes, 3 hours • $16.95

Performed by Morgan Fairchild and Anthony Perkins

All stories selected by the editors of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* — recorded complete and unabridged.

Order both programs and save over 20%
4 tapes, 6 hours • ONLY $26.95

Qty.	Title	Price	Ext.
___	Murder In Hollywood	$16.95	_____
___	Murder With A Twist	$16.95	_____
___	Set of both programs	$26.95	_____
		Subtotal	_____
	Sales tax: CA residents add 8.25% NC residents add 6%		_____
	Shipping and handling: ($2.50 for first item, .75 for each additional item)		_____
		TOTAL	_____

Please mail your order with a check for the total amount to:
Audio Renaissance Tapes 132EL
5858 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 205
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Name _____

Address _____

_____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1992 EQMM READERS AWARD

Last May, when the Mystery Writers of America met to honor writers with the prestigious Edgar Allan Poe awards, *EQMM* was invited to join in the occasion by presenting its 1991 Readers Award at the VIP cocktail party preceding the Edgar Awards banquet. The MWA's recognition of the importance of our award gave great pleasure to the staff of *EQMM*, for since its inception, the magazine has been devoted, as Ellery Queen himself put it, to providing readers with "detective-crime stories in which consistently good writing would be as important as original ideas, excitement, and craftsmanship." The persistent effort to meet Ellery Queen's standards is, in part, we believe, what has made the Readers Award a coveted prize in the mystery community. Of equal importance, however, is the fact that the award comes directly from you. This is the only major award in the field that is decided solely by the vote of those for whom the efforts of writers and editors are undertaken—our valued readers.

In this eighth year of the balloting, we hope you will vote in greater numbers than ever before. Here is your opportunity to pay tribute to the writers who have entertained you throughout the year; it is also a way to let your editors know what type of material you would like to see more of in the future.

As there were very few reprints in 1992, this year's ballot provides for only new short stories: that is, stories bearing recent copyright dates. Spaces are provided for first, second, and third place selections, but you may vote for only one or two, if you like. A point system will apply in counting the total number of votes received, with all first place choices receiving three points, second place choices two points, and third place choices one point. Reprints are not eligible. The story receiving the highest number of points will be the winner.

You may want to refresh your memory of this year's selections by referring to the index on pages 151-155 before turning to page 84 to mark your entries. If you can't recall a story title or its author, describe the plot as briefly as you can. Return the ballot itself (no copies will be accepted) to the address on page 84 postmarked no later than the December 31 deadline. We look forward to seeing your selections!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The 1992 *EQMM* Readers Award-winning story will be announced in the May 1993 issue. If you would like to learn the results of the voting before the May issue goes to subscribers and newsstands, send a standard-size stamped envelope with your name and address (include it with your ballot, if you like) and you will hear back from us by late January.

My first selection for the 1992 *EQMM* Readers Award is:

My second selection is:

My third selection is:

Mail To: The Editors
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10168

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

TERRY MULLINS

Philadelphia author Terry Mullins is a retired editor who likes to lace his stories with references to historical and literary facts—"inconsequential little solvable mysteries" within the larger mystery that he hopes will pique the interest of mystery readers. . .

TOPAZ

by TERRY MULLINS

In Miami a completely cloudless April day can be intolerably hot. Lupe Delores found the air-conditioned Calder Race Course a welcome sanctuary. The sun might be Florida's most famous attraction—what would beaches be without it?—but those who live there all the year appreciate escape from it. Lupe, who had lived for over a decade in Little Havana, considered Calder her playground.

Sometimes one encounters strange playmates in one's playground.

The flashy gentleman (she supposed he was a gentleman, though she applied the description tentatively, subject to revision) who was thanking her for retrieving his beret was unusual. A large muscular man dressed in a lime-green linen suit with suede shoes to match, he had a white scarf carelessly tossed around his neck and not so carelessly pinned in place with a large topaz stickpin. He wore a Rolex watch studded with small topaz jewels and had a ring to match. She guessed he must be in his late thirties and would be considered handsome by any woman over forty.

"This," he said to Lupe, "is one of my Hemingway berets. I would rather lose my car than lose this beret. I am most grateful to you. You must let me buy you a drink."

© *1992 by Terry Mullins.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He overrode her automatic protests simply by ignoring them. His personality was not particularly forceful but he was the sort of person so absorbed in his own way of doing things that he didn't recognize opposition unless it hit him in the face.

Lupe found him amusing and had no intention of hitting him in the face. She had placed her bet for the day, Jolly Giant in the fourth, and was just waiting for the running of the Tropical Park Derby. While she wouldn't miss seeing those three-year-olds run for all the handsome men in Miami, she was willing to be entertained until then.

He seemed to have three subjects of conversation: himself, horse racing, and Hemingway. The first and last tended to coalesce.

"Don't you think I look like Hemingway?" he asked.

"Well, your hair is a bit dark and you don't have a beard," she began.

"No, no. I mean when Hemingway was a young man. I have entered the Hemingway look-alike contest four times. I also entered the Cayo Hueso arm-wrestling contest. I did all right in that but I didn't get far in the look-alike contest. The judges didn't want someone who looked like the young Hemingway. They wanted old guys with white beards and potbellies—Papa Hemingway gone to seed. Have you read Hemingway?"

"Some," Lupe replied. For her, a little Hemingway could suffice for a long time and she laughed at people who romanticized him. The poor man had romanticized himself enough to last out the century.

But he hardly noticed her reply. "I know all about Hemingway," he said. "I also know all about cats. He had fifty. My name, by the way, is Topaz."

"Because of the jewels?"

He looked fondly at the ring and the watch and replied, "No. It is my name. I wear the jewels because it is my name, Dominic Guzman Topaz. I was born on August fourth, so I was named Dominic Guzman after the saint. My father was an American living in Genoa. Later we moved to Florence and I grew up there. We came to America when I was in my early teens. What is your name?"

"Lupe Delores."

"Spanish or Cuban?"

"Cuban."

"I wish you were Spanish. I like everything about Spain. Every July I fly to Pamplona to watch the running of the bulls. On my first visit, I ran through the cobblestone streets to the Plaza de

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Toros, but I ran too fast. The bulls never got near me. They did gore two others and trampled six. No one was killed that time, though I have seen several die in the running since. Hemingway loved that sort of thing. Have you seen the Hemingway House?"

"I went once several years ago, my only trip to Key West."

"I go two or three times a year. He did most of his writing there, you know. I just love that great big bed with its magnificent headboard made from a Spanish monastery gate."

He rambled on until the Tropical Park Derby was announced. She rose and thanked him for the drink.

"But you are not going," he insisted. "You mustn't go."

"I don't want to miss this race," she said.

"Have you bet on it?"

"No, but I want to see it." She was becoming tired of this self-centered man who thought he was Hemingway but who looked like Arnold Schwarzenegger with a moustache.

"I haven't bet on it either. I have a system. I bet and increase my bets until I win. Then I quit," he said, rising and following her.

"You can tell me about it some other time." She tried to be polite. He, however, trailed after her like a tame bull. The noise of the crowd kept him quiet until well after the race was over. Lupe forgot he was there. She turned and found him looming over her.

She walked away saying, "I bet on Jolly Giant in the fourth and I haven't collected yet. Excuse me."

Undeterred, he tagged along. He said, "This has been a wonderful day. Have you ever been to a night club?"

Actually, she hadn't. She had been to Casa Juancho with her aunt and uncle when Tio Juanito's bank held a party for top management, but she was fairly sure that didn't count as a night club. She didn't think night clubs served roast suckling pig. So she said no and he assumed that she had accepted his invitation.

He was put off stride when he saw how much she had won. "That's an awful lot of money," he said at last.

"I only placed one bet and I won," she explained. The bet had been for three hundred dollars and the odds were eight to one, but she wasn't going to let him know the details. As it was, he saw her stuffing a lot of money in her purse and was impressed.

Rather to her surprise, she found herself agreeing to go night clubbing. He drove her to an automatic teller and she deposited her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

winnings. Then they went to an exorbitantly expensive night club and stayed until it closed.

She noticed that once they were in the night club, his manner changed. His conversation remained the same, a catalog of his opinions, likes, dislikes, and past experiences; but that was all on the surface.

His attention was on the club itself, the waiters, the bartender, the cloakroom attendants, even brief glimpses of the kitchen as waiters went in and out. The customers, too, were observed carefully. The eyes of Dominic Guzman Topaz were disciplined as his sentences never were. They seemed alive and active even while his voice was conventional and placid. She wanted to say to him, "Tell me what you see, not what you think," because she felt that his observation was infinitely better than his mind.

But through the long, leisurely evening he talked about himself, his knowledge of cats, and his life in Florence.

"I practically grew up in the Uffizi gallery," he said. "My father worked near the Piazza della Signoria and I had the run of the Loggia, the Palazzo Vecchio, the Palace of the Uffizi, and the gallery itself. I was known to all the guards and I ran errands for them. They paid me a trifle and gave me the freedom of the city.

"I have run down the corridors when they were empty, hearing my footfalls strike the marble floor and echo off the walls and windows and statues. I knew all about Botticelli, Giotto, Raphael, Filippo Lippi, and Rembrandt before I learned about the Caesars. Have you any idea how many works by Dürer there are in Florence? You'd think all of his work was in Germany, wouldn't you? But Room Twenty of the Uffizi has some of the best of both Dürer and Cranach. And in Room Twenty-eight is Titian's Venus of Urbino, which you'd swear was copied by Goya for his Nude Maja, but that woman is Eleonora Gonzaga."

All this while his eyes were watching and timing the waiters, following the customers and noting where each was seated, registering the way people entered and how long they stayed and how they left, calculating the movements and positions of everyone in the club. And when the night club closed, his eyes recorded the action of everyone there.

As he drove her home, his eyes changed to the normal bloodshot eyes of a man who has worked hard and looks forward to rest. When they reached her home, he made no move to get out of the car but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

let her open the door for herself. He said, "We must do this again," and drove off.

"In some things," she said to the dark house before her, "he is very much like Hemingway."

Two days later, during a lull in her work in the branch library, she heard the librarian utter a familiar wail: "The computer is down."

One of their regular patrons wanted the name of the famous art gallery in Florence. "We don't have it in this branch," the librarian said, "but I am sure there are books on Florence in the system if we could just get the computer to work."

"I think you mean the Uffizi gallery," Lupe volunteered.

"Of course, that's it. Thank you so much," the patron said.

Afterward the librarian commented, "I didn't know you were an art expert."

"I'm not," she replied. And because the library was deserted except for the staff, Lupe told of her meeting with Topaz. It made a good subject for several minutes of idle conversation.

"Does he really look like Ernest Hemingway?"

"He tries. He is big and strong and wears a beret. He has grown a brush moustache."

"You must get us a picture of him."

It was, however, May before she saw him again. He drove by her house as she was leaving for the Biscayne Kennel Club. Racing had just begun and there was a neglected greyhound waiting for her to bet on him. The odds were very good.

Topaz insisted that they must go night clubbing again that evening. She finally agreed, slipped back into the house for a small camera, and let him drive her to the track.

"I don't bet on dogs," he said.

"You don't have to bet. We'll have a good time watching the races and I will place my bet. Then tonight we can go to a night club. Will it be the same one?"

"No, the wine was no good there. Tonight we'll go to a different one. I think you'll like it."

"Okay, but I liked the other one."

The afternoon was pleasant. Lupe watched the races, talked with dog owners and others at the club, won and collected her bet, and had Topaz drive her to an automatic-teller machine to deposit her winnings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Two things puzzled her. One was that Topaz, who in the night club had been as alert as a jockey in the home stretch, was fairly listless at the track. He noticed little that was going on around him. Although he still talked about himself and Hemingway, he did so with less animation. The other thing was his resistance to being photographed. She had taken three pictures of him before he realized that she had a camera. When she asked him to pose, he said he did not like cameras. She took two more without his knowing it, but he refused to have a picture taken of the two of them together. For a person as vain as he was, this was strange.

Even stranger was the change that came over him when they drove into the night-club parking lot. He became again the alert, observant person of their first date. His eyes missed nothing.

Once again his conversation was an anecdotal monologue poured out in an almost stream-of-consciousness manner.

She mentioned that on her one trip to Key West a guide had shown her the room Hemingway was in when he received the gun that had killed his father. Topaz responded with a room by room description of the Hemingway House and of Hemingway's stay there.

"You know, of course, that he had fifty cats," he said at one point. "They still have descendants of those cats. They will sell you one. They call it adopting. I bought one. It is big and strong and mean. I call him Papa Hemingway. He has most of the Hemingway traits: a short temper and a streak of real cruelty. You should see him torture a mouse. I guess all cats do that, but Papa is especially vicious. I think of stories of Hemingway humiliating Carlos time after time. Papa treats mice that way before he kills them. Did you know that Hemingway hit some poet so hard he broke his jaw?"

"It was Wallace Stevens."

"That's right. And he beat up a publisher and put him in the hospital. Papa's just that mean, always fighting with every tomcat in the neighborhood; and always after the female cats, just like Hemingway.

"I've bought him a collar encrusted with topaz. I take it off when I let him out."

And on he rambled, a tenth of his attention on what he was saying, his eyes probing all corners of the night club, following every move of the waiters and customers.

It proved to be a long evening. Her second visit to a night club lacked the novelty of the first. Despite differences in decor, the over-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all impact of one night club seemed very much like that of another. At one point she said as much and roused the one spark of interest in Topaz.

"Every night club has its own personality," he said. "For example, Les Violins is completely different from Club Tropigala. One is Vienna and the other the rain forest of Brazil with Latin music. One is slightly decadent, the other primitive. They are not all alike."

Then he picked up his earlier adulation of Hemingway and for an hour there was no opening for her. Finally, she said, "You seem to know all the history and gossip about him, but you don't talk much about his writings."

"He never should have been a writer."

This amazed her. "But that's the whole point, that's what made him what he was. His writings were his self."

"Not at all. It's the man who was important, not his writings. He only wrote to make money, to make a living at first and then to make a lot of money so he could be himself. If it hadn't been for Hollywood, he probably would have quit writing. Hollywood made him rich and introduced him to glamorous women: Ava Gardner, Marlene Dietrich, Ingrid Bergman. He loved the glamour of Hollywood and he should have stayed there, but the writing got in the way of the man."

"They gave him a Pulitzer and a Nobel prize."

"And he didn't care about either one except that they helped him make more money. All fiction is delusion. Making up stories is a form of psychosis. When he finally turned psychotic, it was the culmination of a life of writing novels. What else could you expect? It was the man who was important, not the characters he split off from his personality and put on paper."

It was the most original thing she had heard from him and it illuminated all that he had said before. He had never praised a book that hadn't been made into a moving picture. She wanted to find out if he had actually read anything by Hemingway.

After four hours, Lupe went to the ladies' room, leaving her purse in her chair. When she returned, the purse was on the table and Topaz had changed. "Lupe," he said, "I want you to lend me thirty-five thousand dollars. I have a wonderful opportunity to make a lot of money but I need to put up cash."

"What makes you think I have that sort of money?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I looked at the receipt you got from the machine. It gives both the amount deposited and your balance. You have over thirty-seven thousand. I need thirty-five thousand dollars. I'll pay you back in two months with ten thousand interest."

"You went through my purse?" She was so outraged that she could hardly speak.

"There must be no secrets between us. I tell you all about myself but you tell me little about yourself."

"I don't get much chance."

"So you must not mind if I look to see how much you have in the bank. Otherwise I would not know that you could help me. I can make a lot of money."

She was too surprised and angered to reply.

At that moment both doors of the kitchen were opened and held wide by waiters. It afforded a complete view of the kitchen. Topaz immediately forgot Lupe and concentrated his full attention on the scene.

The manager of the night club was escorting the chef and other kitchen helpers as they brought out a large birthday cake ablaze with candles. Someone was having a ninety-sixth birthday and the club had gone all out to make the occasion a memorable one. Other doors opened and waiters brought in party hats and noisemakers. Topaz stood up so as not to miss a thing. Others rose and began to sing Happy Birthday. In the general confusion, he left the table and milled about in the crowd. She saw him peering into open doors. When he returned, he was flush with excitement and seemed to have forgotten their conversation.

Instead, he talked about Hemingway in Italy. "That is another point I have in common with him," he said, "the influence Italy had on him. It wasn't just the war and being wounded. Something happened to the inner Hemingway in Italy. You know that many years later he returned to the place where he was wounded and buried a thousand-lire note there. You know how much a thousand lire was? He was paying off the devil but it did not solve his problems.

"After he was wounded in Italy, he was afraid of the dark. He kept a light on all night for months. He wrote to get money to pay off the devil. If he had had money from the start, he would never have written a word and he'd have been a greater man for it. I'm going to get money and never write and I'll be the really great man he could have been."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lupe didn't say anything. She just let him talk. She was angry and becoming bored.

Again they stayed until the night club closed. When he drove her home, he returned to the subject of borrowing money. He would not say how he intended to make a lot of money, just that he needed thirty-five thousand to invest.

"But you said there were to be no secrets between us," she said with futile sarcasm.

"It is something I cannot tell, not now. Later I will tell you all about it."

She let herself out of the car and marched into the house with tightly reined fury. No one could get away with going through her purse, no one—and especially not a self-satisfied heavyweight night clubber.

On Monday she spent the half hour before the library opened stacking Sunday papers and replacing them with morning editions where available. An article in *El Herald* stopped her short. The night club they had recently visited had been robbed. Strange. The first one had been robbed a day after they had visited it, too. She sat down and perused the article carefully.

This was the fifth in a series of night-club robberies in the greater Miami area. The same gang carried out all of them. In one robbery the manager and a waiter had been shot. The waiter had died. The latest robbery had taken place just as the club was closing. Some wealthy customers had been robbed, too.

Lupe knew she had to go to the police. She had been brought up to distrust them, but there was one person in the Miami police force she knew. She telephoned and asked to speak with Lieutenant O'Claire.

Three of them came over that afternoon, O'Claire and two detectives. They were interested in what she had to say. She showed the pictures she had taken.

"These don't look like any crook we know of," O'Claire said. "The license number you gave us over the phone is registered to Dominic G. Topaz. We checked the address and talked with neighbors. He is well liked. They think he is a salesman of some sort. He doesn't fit the description of the four men who have been holding up night clubs, but that doesn't prove anything. He could be the one they send out to case the place before they hit it. From what you say, he probably does that very well."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And he takes me along for window dressing."

"He couldn't very well go into a night club all by himself and stay until closing time. Everyone would be suspicious. But with a very attractive young lady, he would seem right in place."

"That would explain another thing, too. He not only never makes any passes at me, he never flatters me at all. He is as gallant as a telephone pole. I could be his kid sister."

"We'll keep an eye on him. Meanwhile, if he asks you out to another night club, I wish you would go."

"Oh, no! I want nothing more to do with him."

"I can't insist, but it would help us a lot if we knew where the gang was planning to strike next. We could be waiting for them."

"I see what you mean. I would like to get back at him. And as Tia Maria says, *'Quien no se arriesga no pasa la mar.'* Who doesn't take a chance never crosses the sea. Maybe I will take a chance."

He returned the photographs and she let him take the negatives. "Our lab will blow them up and make all the copies we want," he said.

Her photographs produced a sensation at the library.

"He's handsome!" a middle-aged woman exclaimed. "You've made me jealous."

Others agreed that he was a hunk of a man. They compared him with pictures of Hemingway and shook their heads. "He's a little like him, the build especially, but he dresses too neat."

"That's it," Lupe agreed. "Hemingway was very—there's no good English word—very *desaseado*."

"Yes, very untidy."

"Very sloppy."

"Not at all like your 'friend' there."

Lupe bristled at the word friend but let it go. She hoped she had seen the last of him.

No such luck. He found her at the racetrack two weeks later and they went to a night club recently opened in Florida City. He took Papa Hemingway along.

"I want you to keep him for me, just a couple of days. Some friends are visiting me and he doesn't like them. They have threatened to kill him," he said.

The cat was in a comfortable carrier and showed no sign of the viciousness he had attributed to it. The drive to Florida City was a long one and Lupe found Papa Hemingway a better companion than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his owner. For one thing, he talked less. He begged to be let out of the carrier and Lupe opened it cautiously, expecting him to pounce out. Instead he stretched mightily, shook his topaz-studded collar, and curled up in her lap.

"He is big," she said, "and heavy."

"It's all muscle," Topaz replied. "Not an ounce of fat. He's a fighter."

"What large eyes, and yellow and green. What kind of cat is he?"

"He's a korat. They come from Thailand. The yellow in his eyes matches the topaz. The green is emerald."

She ran her hand over the silver-blue fur and the cat purred. "It hasn't any markings at all," she said.

"That proves it is a true korat." He began a long lecture which lasted until they reached the night club. There they put Papa back in his carrier and locked the car. Topaz became again the professionally alert observer. Since they had come early, he had his choice of tables and chose one that gave him the best view of strategic points of entry and exit. He talked steadily about cats the whole time they were there. At one point she asked, "Have you read Hemingway's *Cat in the Rain?*"

"I read it," he admitted reluctantly, "but I didn't like it. It wasn't really about cats." Then he went on to describe Hemingway's cats. Her attention wandered. It seemed a particularly tiring evening. Lupe decided that she never wanted to see another night club.

When he finally drove her home, Topaz thanked her briefly for being willing to look after Papa Hemingway for a few days. He bade the cat a long and affectionate farewell.

Once indoors, Lupe poured a saucer of milk for the cat and called the number Lieutenant O'Claire had given her. He thanked her for the information.

"This will be handled by the Florida City and the state police, but I'll go along for the ride," he said.

She was glad to hand responsibility over to someone else. She was tired and sleepy. She dreamt about cats.

Two days later the news reported that an attempt to hold up a Florida City night club had been foiled. Four robbers had been ambushed by police. Instead of surrendering, they opened fire. In the exchange of shots, two gunmen were wounded and captured. A third was captured unharmed. One made it back to a waiting car and was driven off.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So Topaz was part of a gang. Lupe had not been completely convinced before. She had hoped she was wrong. He probably was the driver of the getaway car, but could they prove it? No one answering his description was mentioned in the news reports.

When she returned home from work, Tia Maria told her that the owner of the cat had called. He wanted Papa Hemingway returned. She had written down the address.

Lupe relayed the information to O'Claire and called Papa in from the backyard. She held him while her aunt put the topaz collar on him. They had become fond of the cat and were sorry to see him go.

The address was an old red-brick apartment house. The apartment was two floors below the top. A creaky elevator carried her slowly up. Four apartments and a fire exit huddled around a dark hallway. She rang the bell of one of them.

Topaz waved her in, relieved her of the carrier, and gave a fond greeting to the cat. They had opened the carrier before she saw another man in the room. He was short and pale, with reddish hair and eyebrows. He wore denim shorts, sneakers, and a dirty T-shirt. He had a gun carelessly held in one hand, not an Uzi like those which seemed to be everywhere in Little Havana, but a large revolver. "This is Ron Quirk," Topaz said. The man did not pay any attention to her.

"What are you going to do with the cat?" the man asked.

"He's going with us."

"No, he ain't."

"Look, Ron, this cat will bring us luck. If you hadn't made me send it away, we wouldn't have had the bad luck we did. The cat goes with us."

"Not alive, he don't." The man swung his revolver up and aimed it at Papa Hemingway.

Topaz struck his arm and the bullet went wide. A look of fury blazed over the pale features of the little man. He fired point-blank at Topaz. The bullet struck him in the chest and knocked him over backwards.

Quirk fled into the hallway and Lupe heard him opening the fire door. She went to the open window and leaned out. He had gone out onto an old outside fire escape and was bounding down two steps at a time, causing the ancient iron steps to sway and clang.

Then above, a man in uniform leaned over the edge of the roof and fired a shotgun at the fugitive. Quirk's left arm was shattered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He fired two shots upward. The officer ducked backwards as chips and dust of red brick flew upward.

Lupe heard someone running in the hallway. Lieutenant O'Claire looked out of the fire door and saw Lupe. "Where is Topaz?" he asked.

"He's in here. He's been shot."

O'Claire signaled to officers on a roof across the alley. One of them aimed at the fleeing gunman. He fired a long burst from an automatic weapon. Quirk spun round and fell toward the edge of the fire escape. She thought he would topple over, but he just hung on the rail, his dirty T-shirt stained a bright red.

Lupe turned back toward the prostrate Topaz. O'Claire entered and said, "A medical team is on the way. I doubt that it will be much use." He bent over Topaz and lifted a wrist to feel for a pulse.

Topaz opened his eyes and looked at Lupe. "Take care of Papa Hemingway," he said. "We owe God a death." Blood poured from the side of his mouth, down his cheek, and under his ear. His head lolled to one side and he lay still.

"What was that all about, 'We owe God a death'?" O'Claire asked.

"Those are words spoken by a minor character in one of Shakespeare's plays. Hemingway was fond of the line."

Unconsciously O'Claire crossed himself and said, "It's a pity it never occurred to either Hemingway or to Topaz that we owe God a life."

CUSTOMER SERVICE OR SUBSCRIBER ASSISTANCE

Please direct all changes of address and subscription questions to: Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591.

For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* crime fantasy by

JAMES POWELL

The following story seemed to your editors particularly fitting for the Christmas season, although it is not a Christmas story as such, but a fairy tale about a kidnapped princess, told in such a wry, engaging style it is bound to bring cheer into your home this holiday . . .

RUBY LAUGHTER, TEARS OF PEARL

by JAMES POWELL

On the day Princess Nicolodia was born the King ordered his brother-in-law to stand in the town square, blowing his bugle and handing out slices of bread and butter to the population. The King regretted that he couldn't do more but his was a poor kingdom. In fact, his subjects were slightly better off than he was. At least they could till their fields or tend their shops. But the King was expected to do nothing all day except practice good posture and solemnity. On top of that, he had to live in a drafty palace with a thatched roof and supply his own throne. The King often thought of throwing the whole thing over. But small and poor though the kingdom was, it had been in his family for a long time. So he stayed, rather hoping the people liked it that way. And they rather did. It was nice having a king of their own, particularly one who never taxed them or sent them off to war. Besides, they knew that if this king went away another people's king would come and rule over them.

The people turned out for Princess Nicolodia's christening party armed with covered dishes, for they took pride in the fact that they

© *1992 by James Powell.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never put the King out of pocket for ruling over them. For his part, the King smiled proudly at the baby, kissed his wife, the Queen, drank his share of cider, and danced in his wooden way with any woman who asked him. But all the while he kept an eye peeled for the fairy godmother who serviced the royal families locally. She liked to make her entrance in a flash of blue light, gift in hand. The King prayed it would be a silver christening mug that he could sell on the sly and have indoor plumbing installed in the palace. He feared it would be matching luggage.

But when the last of the fireworks had echoed from the hills, the fairy godmother still hadn't appeared. Hiding his disappointment, the King shook hands with the departing guests. Then he and his wife finished off what remained of the desserts and retired. Sometime after midnight they were awakened by a flash of blue light. There stood the fairy godmother, her pointed hat and the hoops of her hoopskirt askew, waving a leather, three-ring pocket organizer. "I had you people down for next week," she admitted sheepishly. "To make amends I guess I'll have to give Nicolodia the Biggie."

The King nodded, as if that was the most natural thing in the world. The Queen asked, "What's the Biggie?"

"You'll find out come her twelfth birthday," replied the fairy godmother. "Let's just say it's a gift so precious we only get one to give away." She waved the pocket organizer over the baby's crib. "There," she sighed. "Now I'm a lame-duck fairy godmother. When word gets out people will be taking their business elsewhere in droves."

"Suppose we just keep this our little secret?" suggested the King.

The fairy godmother flashed him a grateful smile, waved the pocket organizer again, and disappeared.

When Princess Nicolodia's twelfth birthday finally came around the kingdom had fallen on hard times. First a fungus called tapioca slime destroyed the turnip crop. Then a disease called turnip foot struck the tapioca trees. The tired, careworn faces of the people as they arrived for her birthday party touched the Princess's heart and she began to cry. To everyone's astonishment, her tears turned to pearls as they hit the ground. Now the people's gift was a house sparrow they had painted scarlet and edged its wings in gold, hoping the Princess would believe it was a Carpathian nightingale. The bird made Nicolodia laugh with delight, and when she did, rubies fell from her lips.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The amazed King assigned his brother-in-law the job of following the Princess about with a basket and picking up the pearls and rubies. Then he sat down with the royal councilors to decide what was to be done. The Sticks, as the conservative councilors came to be called, advised filling the royal coffers by giving the Princess daily beatings. The Feathers, or liberals, suggested regular tickling. But the King refused, saying, "Let her live a normal life, laughing when she's happy, crying when she's sad. Surely there's enough joy and sorrow in this life for our little kingdom's needs."

In fact, when news of the phenomenal Princess spread abroad Moody's rating service classified the kingdom Triple A, allowing the King to embark on an ambitious program of public works by borrowing money on anticipated joy and sorrow. He cobbled the streets and established an agricultural college with a special mandate to find a cure for tapioca slime and turnip foot.

As Princess Nicolodia approached marriageable age the sons of the neighboring kings began mooning around. Soon you couldn't throw a rock at the palace porch without drawing royal blood. For her part, the Princess found all this princely attention unsettling and couldn't look out the front window without getting the hiccups.

One day some sharp-eyed strangers calling themselves aluminum-siding salesmen rode into town. That night, while the King's brother-in-law slept curled up around his blunderbuss on the floor outside the Princess's bedroom door, the strangers slipped in by the window and kidnaped her.

The next morning the frantic King tracked the kidnapers' hoofprints out to the great crossroads on the edge of town where they took the turning that led to Bad Wolfstein. That walled city atop a peak in the Slag Mountains was home to the most rapacious people in all creation. City ordinances forbad street signs and public clocks so the natives could sell visitors directions and the time of day. It was the kind of place where people were supposed to be paying you a compliment if they stole your hat. And the sticky-fingered leader of this grasping community was Mr. Many-Pockets himself, His Honor Mayor Avaricious O'Greedy.

When the King told his people where the Princess had been taken they vowed to storm the city and rescue her. But he advised against it. Bad Wolfstein thrived on besieging armies. During the day, secure behind their walls, they would bundle up the arrows shot into the city for resale back to the enemy. At night, particularly just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after the besiegers had a payday or received parcels from home, the Bad Wolfsteiners would slip out on crepe soles and steal anything in the enemy camp that wasn't nailed down. When winter came they prospered by selling the besiegers blankets and firewood. By spring the same army that had advanced up the mountain with bright battle flags and shining armor would creep back down again barefoot, bankrupt, and in burlap rags. "No," said the King, "I must put on the royal thinking cap and find some clever plan to rescue the Princess." To devote himself entirely to this purpose he appointed his brother-in-law king *pro tem*.

For the next few days the people watched the King walking about scratching his head. Then one afternoon they saw him stop in his tracks and pound a fist in the palm of his hand. After that he could only be seen early mornings coming back from the newsstand studying the *Wall Street Journal*. For the rest of the day he locked himself up in the music conservatory, an old armory whose walls the Queen had decorated with musical instruments. Soon the most ear-splitting caterwaul was coming from that end of the palace, as if every musical instrument had been rolled into one and then tormented with a sharp stick to the accompaniment of an interminable metallic clatter. This was followed by several weeks of screams and terrible noises like someone retching on a large tongue depressor.

Meanwhile the kingdom had fallen on hard financial times. The cobblestone supplier, faced with a long overdue account, came around with a crew to dig up the streets. The King might have soft-soaped the man out of it. But all his brother-in-law could think to do was bob and weave and challenge him to a fistfight, which he lost. The kingdom felt the humiliation deeply and stayed indoors until the cobbles had been carted away.

Finally the King announced he was ready to go to Bad Wolfstein and rescue his daughter. And he sent word to the porch crowd offering to put in a good word for any prince who joined him. But they declined, citing rude cabbies, the crosstown traffic, parking, and the high prices of everything. Only a young student named Swineherd stepped forward. Swineherd had fallen in love with the Princess, who'd been in his animal psychology class. But he'd never declared his love. How could a penniless commoner aspire to the hand of a princess with tears of pearl and ruby laughter?

So the King kissed the Queen goodbye. Then he and Swineherd loaded up the palace handcart with mysterious boxes and packages and set off. They hadn't gone far when they met a young boy named

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack leading a cow. Jack was on his way to be swindled at the Bad Wolfstein cattle market. Now the King happened to be carrying some magic beans dreamed up by the research and development boys at the agricultural college. When he suggested trading the magic beans for Jack's cow, the young boy agreed and turned homeward, delighted to save the shoe leather.

As the King and Swineherd continued on their way, the young man told his tragic story. One year his father, a forward-looking pig farmer, decided to get top dollar for his animals by herding them fifty miles to the railhead for shipment out East. The morning of the pig drive he'd opened the farmyard gate and, standing in his stirrups, he'd waved his broad-brimmed hat and called out, "Pigs yo-o!" In a shot, two thousand pigs were off and running every which way. Many reached the forest where the giant swill-berries grew. Enough found their way into neighborhood cook pots to make the air smell of pork and sauerkraut for weeks. Swineherd had come to agricultural college seeking the answer to the question his father, now a broken man, kept muttering to himself: "If we can't herd them, why in hell do they call us swineherds?" As Swineherd's story ended, the turrets of Bad Wolfstein were rising in the distance.

At the city gate the King and his young companion found that admission cost one chicken per person. The tollbooth man took the cow and gave them three chickens change. They were soon pushing the handcart down narrow, crooked streets through surly, jostling crowds.

"We'll never find her in a place like this," despaired Swineherd.

"Sure we will," said the King. "Trust me. I've thought this whole thing out."

Soon a hard rain began to fall. At the next tavern the King went inside and spoke to the owner. Then he and Swineherd pushed the handcart around to the back. "Figuring they'd be short on entertainers by now, I offered to be tonight's floor show," explained the King. "It'll get us our supper and a dry place to sleep." Then he took a concertina, a ukulele, two tambourines, a set of cymbals, and a harmonica out of the handcart, attaching them about his person with ingenious straps, harnesses, and rigs. The concertina, for example, he buckled between his knees. The cymbals he wore like a hat and clashed by means of springs and a pull chain.

"Can I be your assistant?" asked Swineherd, who was anxious to see the show.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"One-man bands don't have assistants," replied the King, strapping on a pair of roller skates. "Your job will come soon enough. For now just guard the chickens."

The King glided through the back door and into the smoky spotlight. The half-empty barroom greeted him with that particular groan reserved for one-man bands who tap dance on roller skates. But the King, knowing cutthroats and brigands were a sentimental lot, had tailored his act accordingly, ending with a sing-along including numbers like "Bad Wolfstein Must Be Heaven For My Mother Came From There" and "Carry Me Back to Old Bad Wolfstein (That's Where the Rotters and the Cons and Traitors Go)" that left the crying barflies clapping for more. As he skated from the floor it occurred to the King that he was probably the first of his line to sweat. Supper was thin soup and sour beer. But the next night a packed house and thunderous applause earned a thicker soup and a modest chablis.

Just as the food arrived, a short man in a shiny suit slid into the booth with the King and Swineherd and introduced himself as Max, a theatrical agent. "Caught your act," he said. "Not bad. Too good for this dump. Sign with me and I'll get you two weeks at the Plaza." When the King agreed, Max called for another spoon, ate ten percent of their soup, and hurried off about his business.

So the act opened at the Plaza. The next day, as the King read the sterling review in the *Morning Bugle*'s "Man About Bad Wolfstein" column, Swineherd sighed and said, "I wonder what Nicolodia's doing right now."

"Crying, I should think," said the King, turning the paper to the financial section. "Pearl values started on the skids about the time she was kidnaped. Now they're in a real tailspin. You can't even give pearls away." He gave the young man a comforting look. "I know all this waiting around's hard to take. But my plan's working. Didn't you see who caught the act last night? The big guy in the fake beard at the corner table."

"The one who stole the ashtray when he left?"

The King nodded. "O'Greedy himself."

"I don't get it."

"I said entertainers were in short supply," the King reminded him. "Doesn't that tell you something?"

Just then Max hurried in and asked the King, "Hey, can you do funny?"

"Can I ever," said the King.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So here's the deal," said Max. "A certain party needs to be cheered up and kept that way. It's big bucks if we can do the job. On the down side, if we fail, I lose a client." To make his meaning clear Max chopped off an invisible head with the edge of his hand.

A carriage was waiting for them after the midnight show. The King rode in silence, sitting there in his one-man band outfit, staring into the darkness. Earlier he had instructed Swineherd to do all the talking. He had also ordered him to wear roller skates, too, and not to forget the chickens. The trip took them up and up many a steep street until they reached one that dead-ended at an old abandoned coopers' warehouse where wooden barrels had once been stored. At their knock the warehouse door opened and the King stepped through. But when Swineherd tried to follow he was grabbed by the shirt and lifted off his feet. A giant of a man with a battered head and ears and nose to match examined him by torchlight. "Now just who the hell are you?" he demanded in a cutthroat voice.

"I'm his assistant," gasped Swineherd.

The man tightened his grip a couple of turns and hissed, "One-man bands don't have assistants."

"He's been sick."

The man's mouth moved as though chewing over Swineherd's words. Then he demanded, "Why the chickens?"

"For the big finale," said Swineherd.

The man hurled Swineherd into the arms of the four burly ruffians guarding the King. Decked out in knives, swords, peg legs, eyepatches, and an occasional hook for a hand, this sinister crew frisked the new arrivals for weapons, then seized them by the elbows and rolled them up a series of ramps until they reached the fifth floor. More armed men joined them along the way, until their escort grew to twenty. The King smiled reassurances at his worried young companion as they were pushed into a large, windowless, high-ceilinged room lit and warmed by a small brazier in the middle of the floor. There, tied to a chair next to the fire, was the King's weeping daughter. As his eyes adapted to the gloom he saw the floor lay thick with pearls. In one corner, beside a burlap sack half filled with pearls, stood a broom and a dustpan, as if someone had tired of sweeping them up. In fact, the walls were stacked ceiling high with sacks of unmarketable pearls.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If there's no profit in sorrow, we must try laughter," said the Mayor of Bad Wolfstein, who was sitting over to one side with an executioner's axe across his knees. O'Greedy was still wearing the full black beard of the night before, perhaps as protection against the chill in the air. "Of course, it's a no-lose situation for me," he continued. "Make the young lady laugh and I grow richer. Fail and I get to chop off your head. No big thrill, you say. True, but a damn cheap one. And I'm fond of cheap." O'Greedy signaled for more torches for the performance.

As the room filled with light, the Princess recognized her father and laughed with joy, adding rubies to the pearls at her feet. An amazed O'Greedy looked from the precious stones to the King and Swineherd and his jaw fell even more. The two unarmed men who stood before him a moment ago were now holding swords.

The King cocked his head apologetically while he gave his chest a dyspeptic rap with his fist. Yes, the one-man band who tap danced on roller skates had also mastered the ancient art of sword swallowing. Before the Mayor could sound the alarm, the King placed four roller-skate wheels in the middle of the man's chest and toppled him over backwards. O'Greedy's men laughed from the doorway, thinking it part of the act. They grinned as the King skated backwards in a circle around the room playing "Happy Days Are Here Again" on tambourine, harmonica, cymbals, and concertina, while behind his back he beat out the rhythm with his sharp sword on the bags of pearls along the walls. But when they saw Swineherd cut Nicolodia's bonds, O'Greedy's men rushed into the room just in time to be upended by the gush of pearls across the floor.

As the Mayor and his henchmen struggled to regain their footing and pearls hissed out onto the floor, the lower sacks sagged, setting those above to teetering. The King and Swineherd quickly skated the Princess out of the room and bolted the door behind them. At the top of the ramp the King introduced his daughter to Swineherd and explained why the young man had come. Then the King ordered her to hold the chickens and, turning his back, he tucked her knees under his arms while the young man grabbed her around the waist from behind. Then, bending at the knees like skiers, the two men went rolling downward with the Princess between them, picking up speed as each floor flashed by. But when they hit the top of the final ramp the King saw the doorkeeper. The man must have heard them coming. There he was planted sideways in the open doorway with a large club on his shoulder and his hindquarters wagging like Mud-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ville's Casey, daring the human contraption on wheels to try to get by him. Suddenly the man's smile vanished, he dropped the club and vanished out the door. The King glanced back over his shoulder and uttered a royal curse. Rushing down the ramp close behind them was a three-foot-high wall of pearls. On top of it, riding the door to the fifth-floor room like a surfboard, was O'Greedy, his beard flowing out behind him, waving the executioner's axe.

The King, the Princess, and Swineherd passed through the open door and went careening down the steep cobblestone street in the moonlight. Behind them they heard the roar as the pearly mass burst through the warehouse door and came rolling after them, O'Greedy, door, and all. The King had anticipated the possibility of pursuit but nothing like this. All he could do was crouch more to reduce the drag. Down, down they went at a dizzying clip with the nacreous death at their heels until, at last, they reached the lower town on whose leveler streets the rushing tide of pearls started to lose momentum. So did the roller skates. But not O'Greedy. He shot ahead of the ebbing pearls, riding the door across the slick cobbles and coming on fast. Ahead the King could see the torches marking the city gate. Would they reach it in time? And even if they did, would that be enough to save them? "Skate, man! Skate like hell!" he shouted back at Swineherd. But they couldn't outrace O'Greedy. The man was breathing down Swineherd's neck. As they reached the gate the Mayor raised the executioner's axe.

"Quick, the chickens!" ordered the King as they entered the toll-booth's exact-change lane. His daughter tossed the chickens into the toll hopper. O'Greedy was right behind and halfway into his downswing with the axe when the tolltaker, not recognizing who was behind the fake beard, reached out an arm that stopped the Mayor dead in his tracks to demand another chicken.

A moment later something woke the children in the lower town and drew them to their bedroom windows. When they saw the streets shining with pearls in the moonlight, they rubbed their eyes in wonderment and called their parents. The parents came grumpily and, being up-to-date on such matters, went back to bed, scoffing, "Pearls, only pearls. There's no profit in pearls." But the children stayed at the window with their cheeks in their hands until the sun rose and the street cleaners came to wash the pearls away. But the children would never forget those pearls in the moonlight nor cease to marvel that something with no profit in it could be so beautiful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As for Princess Nicolodia and Swineherd, they married, built a home, and started to raise a family. Happiness was the general state of affairs and the rubies fell thick and fast. They kept enough for their own modest needs and gave the rest to the King. Soon the town had been recobbled, the agricultural college expanded, and thanks to Moody's reinstated Triple A rating, an irrigation system constructed that brought water to every field in the kingdom. The King had just started drawing up plans for a convention center when oversupply kicked the bottom out of the ruby market.

One night at the dinner table as she passed her preoccupied husband the turnips, the Queen said, "A penny for your thoughts."

"I was just wondering what I'm going to tell the cobblestone man this time," said the King.

As he spoke his brother-in-law came in and, apologizing for being late, sat down and said, "Hey, leave the cobblestone man to me."

"How so?" asked the King.

"Remember back there when Nicolodia was having all those hiccups?" said his brother-in-law as he unfolded his napkin. "Didn't I ever show you those weird little things that popped out with every hic? The tiny rectangles with connected dots and lines on them? Well, I looked those little buggers up one way and down the other. Damned if I could figure out what they were for. So I said to myself, Brother-in-law, you're just going to have to build a machine these doohickeys'll fit into. And I did. It turned out to be a computer. They're computer chips."

"Ah," said the King, as though that was the most natural thing in the world.

"What's a computer?" asked the Queen.

"Damned if I know," said the brother-in-law. "Nobody'd ever built one before. But our worries are over. I got some Japanese businessmen talking big bucks."

The King smiled and cocked his head. Life was certainly strange. There was no profit in pearls or rubies or in joy or sorrow, for that matter. But hiccups, it looked like hiccups were a different story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Ellery Queen attributed to Florence Mayberry a keen understanding of the minds of women. She has also, we think, a fine grasp of the world of childhood, keeping the difficult balance, in drawing her young characters, between what is perceived and what is really understood. . . .

THE SECRET

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Grandma said, "Time to get the milk, Sary."

I was glad it was time because then I could visit with Miss Abbie and the girls. This took a while. Sit in one of the cane-bottomed kitchen chairs, eat a cookie and watch the fluttering hands of Mable and Roxy, try to guess what they said before Miss Abbie translated for me. Mable and Roxy were deaf-and-dumb. Dumb of voice, not of mind, because Miss Abbie declared they were smart as tacks even if they hadn't had much school learning. She should know because she was their older sister and had been with them all their lives. Brightest little things you ever saw, she said, those twin baby girls, keeping an eye on everything from their crib, walked early, figured they'd talk early too. Only they didn't, beyond a queer baby gurgle deep in their throats. They could hear the loudest sounds, like a thunder clap, because they'd whirl their heads toward it. But any noise that didn't shake the house they'd pay no mind to. So you had to look right at them and move your lips slow, or use deaf-and-dumb talk with your hands like Miss Abbie did.

Grandma handed me the tin milk bucket and I walked barefooted down the grassy middle of the road to the house of Miss Abbie and the girls, avoiding the dusty ruts made by wagons and buggies.

© *1992 by Florence V. Mayberry.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nobody in our Missouri town had an automobile, danged things good for nothing but to scare horses. It was midsummer, hot but pleasant in early mornings and late afternoons because our town was in the Ozark Mountains in a high, rolling valley. On one side of the road, just beyond our house, was the woods where in spring I could find violets peeking through dead leaves packed by winter snows. Splitting the woods into two unequal parts, the larger part on the far side, ran the creek, arched over by joined tree branches. On the creek's near side was the pasture where Mable and Roxy let their two cows feed. On the creek's far side was a scrub pasture not fit for grazing. Gypsies and other folks traveling by covered wagon sometimes used it for a camping ground.

When I reached the yard of Miss Abbie and the girls, Roxy was walking to the house with her milk pail, leaning one-sided to balance its weight. She waved, her mouth spread in a laugh, and jabbed her finger excitedly toward the little barn where she and Mable did the milking. This meant she had won. Every night she and Mable raced to see who could milk the fastest; they each did a cow, everything was twin with them.

"Evening, Roxy," I said, my lips making large and slow movements so she could read them.

"Yah-h-h-uh, gugh-gugh, yah-h-uh!" she said. She and Mable always tried to talk to me. I ached inside me when they did but I hated to ask Miss Abbie to have them stop, they were so pleased that I could hear their sounds. When they were together as they did that talking they would bob their heads at each other, grimace with laughter, turn and "Yah-h-h-uh, gugh-gugh, yah-h-uh!" at me again. It sent tingly chills down the back of my legs like when you hear that somebody cut their finger or broke a leg or something.

Mable came jog-trotting out of the barn, gargling and gurgling as she hurried, pointing at her milk pail to show it was fuller than Roxy's, then flying her free hand in deaf-and-dumb words at Roxy. Roxy's hand danced in answer and they both strangled out their laughter.

Miss Abbie came out on the back porch. "Evening, Sary . . . been expecting you. The girls thought you might be a little early so's you could watch them milk."

They were always wanting me to do that. Once, for manner's sake, I did, but afterwards I didn't drink milk for days; it was the first time I had really thought about how milk came out. So now I managed to come a little late.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The girls carried their milk pails down cellar beneath their house where big shallow pans were set out to hold the milk for cooling. "Come set a while," Miss Abbie said, taking my bucket. "The morning's milking is up here ready for you, nice and cool. Help yourself to a cookie from that crock on the table. The girls just baked them. They'll be up directly to visit with you. Your Grandma won't mind you waiting a bit, will she?"

I shook my head. Grandma never minded about me eating between meals, or waiting extra, or anything much I wanted to do. I was their orphaned baby girl, a skinny little kid she and Grandpa had had a time raising up to the age of seven. Or so they said. Actually I felt fine, just skinny.

I hurried to eat the cookie before Roxy got to the kitchen and did her trick. For reasons known only to herself, she thought letting her false teeth click together outside her mouth in a terrifying skeleton grin amused me. She did it at least once every time I came, followed by throwing back her head in a gargly laugh and gleefully patting her round stomach. She did it so often that finally the teeth loosened and sometimes dropped out when she didn't want them to. Like once in church when she was pretending to sing. Embarrassed her so, she ran out of church crying.

Except for their brown eyes, Mable and Roxy didn't look alike. Roxy was round, plump, and flouncy. A strong girl but always had poor teeth, Miss Abbie said. Probably from too much sucking on sugar lumps and eating sweets, young'un or grown, ruined her teeth and put weight on her. Mable was tall and slim with honey-blonde hair. It really looked pretty with those brown eyes. Kept her own teeth, white as snow, too. Although the twins were in their thirties and should have seemed old to a child of seven, they didn't. Everybody called them the deaf-and-dumb girls and that's how I thought of them. As girls.

Roxy's cheeks were full and rosy, her dark brown hair kept in a knot on top of her head, her neck smooth and white. "It's a shame Roxy's deaf-and-dumb," Grandma sometimes said. "Strong, handy girl like that. Not exactly pretty, but right good-looking. And Mable, with a little fixing she'd be a beauty. I feel real bad those two girls have to end up old maids."

Grandpa would crinkle his brows, shake his head, and say, "Maybe won't need to, got to be men around would count it a blessing to have a deaf-and-dumb woman in the house." Then laugh when Grandma stomped her foot at him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mable for sure was the pretty one of the two. Wore her blonde hair in a braid like a crown around her head and looked like the Virgin Mary in the stained-glass window in our church. "Mable's a mite thin, though," decided Grandma, who was even plumper than Roxy. "And you watch it, Missy, or you'll end up the same way if you don't eat your vittles." Which did nothing to encourage my appetite. I wished I could end up looking like Mable.

When they had the milk in pans, the girls came up to the kitchen, Roxy's head peeking mischievously at me around the taller Mable. I stiffened as she opened her mouth, pushed out her teeth with her tongue, and clacked them at me. It made me afraid that next thing her eyes might pop from their sockets, her arms and legs fly off like a doll coming to pieces. I covered my eyes with my fingers, peeking through to see when she came together again. That was part of the game for Roxy. She popped her teeth inside and both girls laughed, gurgles bubbling in their barren throats.

Then Mable put her finger against her mouth in a hush gesture, a signal for me to stay put. "She has a surprise for you," Miss Abbie said. "Been working on it for days."

Mable left the kitchen and Roxy came and sat before me. The girls never sat beside me, always in front so they could watch what I said. Mable returned, one hand behind her back, the other fluttering at Miss Abbie. "She wants you to shut your eyes," Miss Abbie said. I did, felt Mable move close and a featherweight object fall on my lap. "Now look," Miss Abbie said.

I opened my eyes. On my lap was a tiny dress made of sprigged calico, a ribbon sash around its waist. I sprang up, holding the little dress before me, hopping in delight. It was the size of my china-headed doll, the one my mother had played with when she was a little girl. I ran to Mable and hugged my face against her flat stomach.

When I looked up she was crying, tears dripping down her cheeks. I turned to Miss Abbie, frightened. "What did I do?"

"Nothing but be happy like Mable hoped. She's crying because she's so glad you like it."

Mable's hands clenched and spread, making signs at her older sister. "She's saying, she wishes she had a little girl just like you."

"Why doesn't she get one then?"

Miss Abbie's hands moved, and the twins doubled over with soundless laughter. Along with Mable's tear-streaked cheeks and the doubling up, it looked peculiar, like they had stomachaches. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

didn't seem to me I had said anything funny, but Roxy was so tickled she clacked out her teeth at me again. With her teeth grinning in front of her mouth, she handed me the cookie plate, motioning for me to take another. I didn't want to, but I did. Good manners make you never let on to a deaf-and-dumb girl you love that she makes you sick.

"Has the Gypsy tinkerman come to your place yet?" Miss Abbie asked. I shook my head. "Well, reckon he hasn't had time to get around, not been here either, even though he's camped right beside us. I got a kettle needs mending, maybe he'll come around tomorrow."

I almost choked on the cookie, I was so excited. "Oh, Miss Abbie, please let Roxy and Mable take me to see the Gypsies! Grandma won't ever let me go alone."

"Don't think that would be right. There's no women along with this Gypsy wagon, just two lone men," Miss Abbie said doubtfully. "Just an old man and a young one, maybe his son, look alike."

"Oh please, Miss Abbie! I've never ever visited a Gypsy camp. Roxy's big and strong, she can take care of Mable and me. Please!"

Miss Abbie looked uncertain, made deaf-and-dumb talk to the girls. They clapped their hands, excited as I was. Three pairs of hands danced in the air, and at last the girls motioned for me to follow them.

Miss Abbie trailed after us and we all passed through the cow lot, into the side pasture that led to the creek.

Across the creek a dark-skinned old man with white hair to his shoulders sat on a box beside the covered wagon watching a younger man stir something over a cookfire. Even though the second man was younger, to me he looked pretty old too, almost as old as Miss Abbie, who was forty-some. That man raised his face, saw us across the creek, and nodded his head in greeting. A big man, his arms heavy-muscled.

Miss Abbie nodded back, curt and quick, but Roxy and Mable were all smiles, nodding and waving. "Head for the house, Sary!" Miss Abbie ordered, soft but sharp. She yanked the girls around and shoved them toward the cow barn. "Never should've come, never should've come!" she kept muttering. "Run get your milk, Sary, and hike for home before your grandma gets anxious."

When we reached the back steps of their house, Mable turned fiercely on Miss Abbie, clenched her hands, stomped up and down, had a regular tantrum, her pretty face squeezed up and tears run-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ning down her cheeks. Roxy threw her arms around her twin and grunted at Miss Abbie like an angry little pig.

Miss Abbie looked flabbergasted. Her hands flashed before the girls, theirs answered back. "What on earth's got into these girls, wanting to hang around staring at that camp!" Miss Abbie wasn't really talking to me, just letting out her shock. "Waving, acting so tickled! Those men could take them wrong. I knew I shouldn'ta let you children go down there, it ain't ladylike."

That's how she felt about Roxy and Mable, like they were her children.

I scampered toward home, leaving Mable still snubbing Miss Abbie and Roxy sassing her with her hands.

As I sat on our front porch with Grandma that night, I saw the Gypsy campfire still burning. The sound of a mouth organ drifted to us, mingled with night sounds of a bird's sleepy twitter, frogs croaking, insects singing. Fireflies danced around our yard as the music switched from fast and bouncy to soft and sweet, dreamy and sad, back to bouncy. I got off Grandma's lap and whirled in the moonlight with the fireflies.

"Careful, or you'll be getting yourself with the moon madness," Grandma said, her voice easy and comfortable. It was just something to say because the night was so pretty.

After I went to bed I lay across its foot, my face by the window with the moonlight shining full on it. I wished I could catch the moon madness. Then I would be crazy enough to creep out of the house, run down the lane, cross the pasture, wade the creek, and sit beside the Gypsy fire and its music. When I fell asleep I dreamed I did.

Next afternoon when I went for the milk Roxy was still mad at Miss Abbie. Pouting, wouldn't make her fingers say anything. "I caught her down by the creek today after she let the cows into the pasture," Miss Abbie explained testily. "Just acting the fool, waving at that Gypsy man, so I sent her hiking home. So now she's stuffed up in a sulky fit."

Mable was acting strange too, broody, no fun at all. Quick as I could, I took my pail and started home.

But Roxy skittered between me and the back screen door, and clacked her teeth at me. A smile like that is pretty terrible, but I knew what she meant. She was sorry about being unfriendly. She took my milk pail, motioning she would carry it for me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once we were out of sight of the house she bent down with her finger to her lips, shaking her head back and forth. Sh-h-h-h, she meant. She pointed toward the pasture and the creek. Smoke from the Gypsy fire rose in a graceful frond, seeming to bear with it the lively sound of the mouth organ. Not that Roxy could hear the music, but she could see the younger man with the instrument at his mouth as he sat on a stack of firewood beside the fire. Maybe her skin felt the music.

She jabbed her finger toward the camp, pointed at herself, then at me, again at the camp.

I shook my head no, pointed toward my house, then toward where Miss Abbie was. Moved my mouth in a lip message, "Grandma —Miss Abbie—they won't let us go over there."

Her head bounced yes-yes-yes defiantly, and she pulled me behind the stable. Took a stub pencil and a piece of paper out of her apron pocket. "Tonight we go," she wrote. "Abbie sleep. Granma sleep. Mable sleep. Roxy Sary go jipsy have fun."

I shook my head.

Roxy stamped first one foot, then the other, hard. She wrote again: "I go my self alone."

Roxy was a grown woman and I was only seven. But she was deaf-and-dumb and everybody knew those girls had to be looked after, that's why Miss Abbie never married, gave her life to them. So what else could I do? A deaf-and-dumb girl shouldn't go traipsing out alone at night, maybe fall in the creek and drown, not being able to call for help.

Besides, I wanted to go.

"All right," I mouthed. "I go too."

Roxy whirled in a clumsy dance of pleasure. Then wrote with her stub pencil, "Tonight cum barn I here."

I nodded, ran for home as though the devil was after me. Quivered inside all through supper, knowing the devil would surely be waiting for me at the Gypsy camp, pitchfork and all, because of the sneakiness I was helping Roxy carry out.

"Think I'll set on the porch a while," Grandma said after supper. "Want me to sing to you?"

"Hunh-uh. I'm too sleepy."

"Mite sleepy myself," Grandma said. "I'll not set out long, just enough to settle the day. You run along to bed."

I lay in bed tight as a string in a hard knot, listening to the creak-creak of Grandma's cane rocker. Heard the far-off music of the mouth organ and Grandma begin to hum with it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At last the creaking stopped and Grandma's solid steps crossed through the sitting room into the kitchen. The tin dipper clinked against the water bucket. She went into her bedroom and after a bit the bedsprings squeaked under her weight.

When her lighter snore joined Grandpa's I slipped off my nightgown, pulled on my dress, tiptoed away from the bed. Turned back, fluffed the quilt over my pillow so it looked like someone was in bed.

Out on the porch, Nervy, our big black tomcat, meowed and rubbed against my leg. I picked him up, stroked him to make him hush for fear Grandma would hear and get up to let him inside. I tiptoed into the shadows beside the porch, heart pounding, listening for Grandma's footsteps. When none came I ran from the yard, down the lane, toward the cow barn. Halfway there I realized I still had Nervy in my arms, dropped him, and ran on.

Roxy appeared so suddenly out of the barn that I had to stifle a squeal of fright. She began strangling with deaf-and-dumb sounds and I hushed her with my finger against her lips. Her head bobbed in agreement, she took my hand and led me to the pasture.

Both men were sitting beside their campfire but the old one looked asleep, his head drooped almost to his knees. As we hesitated, watching, he jerked and swayed, raised his head, dropped it again. Roxy pulled me forward until we stood opposite the campfire. The men, one nodding and the other busy with his mouth organ, didn't see us. Then the old one staggered to his feet, rubbed his back, went to the covered wagon, and climbed in.

The younger man put down his mouth organ to stir the fire, looked up, and saw us staring at him. He stood up and walked to the creek bank. Somehow, that close, he stopped looking like a foreign stranger but just a plain man, like he'd come in from just some other town. "Howdy!" he called. "Come on over and visit a while. Evening's nice."

Roxy stood there, grinning, too far away to read his lips. I said, "She's deaf-and-dumb, she can't hear you."

He beckoned, smiling, pointing to the boxes set beside the fire. Roxy took a step forward, stopped bashfully. He beckoned again—another step, beckon, step, until she reached the water's edge. Then shook her head, pointed to her shoes, pointed at the water. I moved close to her, uncertain, ready to run back to the barn, felt the tremble in her body. The big man bent down, unlaced his shoes, kicked them off his unsocked feet, rolled up his pants legs. Then he waded calf-high across the creek, swung Roxy over his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and carried her to the campfire. He turned and came back towards me.

I ran backwards toward the barn, tripped, fell, scrambled up like a terrified little animal. The man stood, hands on hips. "Don't be afeered, I'll carry you acrost."

I shook my head. He shrugged, waded back. I stood, watching to see that nothing happened to Roxy.

The firelight revealed a big happy grin on Roxy's face. She looked up at the man, pointed at her throat, shook her head; pointed at her ears, shook her head. Opened her mouth, went, "Aanh-aanh, aanh!" The man nodded, patted her back, urged her to sit down on a box, and sat on another beside her. He picked up his mouth organ, blew high piercing notes, dropped the organ, made signs meaning could she hear that. Roxy nodded, lying probably. Or maybe she did, the sound was so high pitched, because she kept nodding as he played. The man suddenly stood up, playing the organ with one hand, pulling Roxy to her feet with the other, swaying with the music, Roxy lumbering after him, hopping up and down, a look of unutterable joy on her face. She let go his hand, stomped her feet up and down in time with some awkward tune inside herself. It was like a show, the fire for footlights, the man and his music the orchestra, Roxy the dancer. I sat down to watch.

When I awoke, shivering on the damp rough pasture grass, the moon was still high. But the fire had burned to embers and the two figures were shadows leaning against each other.

I walked to the creek bank, motioned at Roxy. She jumped up, hurried to the creek, lifted her skirt like she was going to walk into the water with her shoes on. But the big man swung her to his shoulder and toted her across. When he set her beside me she was breathing hard and fast, gurgling in her throat. It maybe would have been a giggle if she hadn't been deaf-and-dumb.

Roxy walked me up to our gate and I skittered inside the house and into bed with my clothes still on. Listened for a sound from Grandma. Nothing but snores. Took off my clothes, found my nightgown, got into bed and fell down a tunnel of sleep.

Next afternoon I played like I had a stomachache and Grandpa went for the milk. I was afraid to face Roxy for fear one of us might let on to Miss Abbie we'd been up to something. Grandma gave me peppermint tea and sent me to bed early. I didn't mind, I was sleepy.

I stirred awake to the striking of our big old wall clock, counted ten. I crept out of bed, padded through a path of moonlight to the window that faced the pastures and the creek.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The tinkerman's campfire still burned, but I heard no music. This time I didn't bother to dress but slipped outdoors in my nightgown, ran barefooted through the damp grass growing between the wagon ruts, and across the cow paddock. I hid behind a clump of elderberry at the corner of the cow barn and watched what was happening across the creek.

I blinked my eyes, afraid I was still sleepy and not seeing right. But what I saw stayed the same. The tinkerman had his arms around Roxy and was kissing her right on the mouth. My cheeks burned with shame for her. Not even my Grandma and Grandpa did that and they had been married forty-two years.

I slipped back, close beside the barn, ran up the road to our house, got into bed, couldn't sleep. Next day I was really sick, no pretend about it, and had to take some of Grandma's bitter patent medicine along with more peppermint tea.

It was two or three days before I felt like going for the milk again. I thought maybe Roxy would look sick too. She didn't. Her face was all shiny and her eyes sparkled like she might be watching a merry-go-round go round and round and she was fixing to get on it. It made me feel lots better. Maybe being kissed wasn't so bad after all.

Still, I wasn't sure I wanted to see any more of that kissing. For a whole week I didn't slip over to the pasture and creek in the nighttime. But I could hear the music from our front porch, see the dancing flames of the fire. It made me restless, and I argued with myself about it. Surely by this time Roxy and the tinkerman would be tired of kissing. So finally one night I crept out and hid again behind the elderberry bush.

Was I ever surprised! This time three figures sat beside the fire. Roxy, the big tinkerman. And Mable. The old man wasn't there. The three of them had their backs turned toward me and the creek, and the tinkerman was making shadow pictures against the white canvas top of the covered wagon with his hands and the firelight. He made a dog chase a rabbit, the dog's mouth snapping in fierce bites, the rabbit's ears going up and down. Then he made a man run, with a gun on his shoulder. The man vanished and a monkey climbed up and down the canvas.

The twins clapped their hands and Roxy jumped up to dance along with the shadow monkey, up and down, bouncy-bouncy. The tinkerman caught her hands and they danced around the fire while Mable clapped for them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then it happened. Not for fun, not to tease anybody. Caused by the bouncing, up and down, fast, fast. Roxy's teeth popped outside her mouth in a horrid skeleton grin at the tinkerman and he froze in his tracks. She shoved her teeth inside her mouth and ran to the creek, jumped into the water shoes and all, ran past me and the elderberry bush and around the barn.

With a detached smile, Mable watched the awkward, bulky figure of her sister vanish. Then she looked up at the tinkerman, her cheeks bright with reflected firelight. Her blond head ducked bashfully as the man sat beside her and took her hand in his. For a long time neither moved, so long that my eyes turned dry and scratchy like itchy marbles. I blinked to keep them open, started to edge backwards toward the road and home. Stopped, horrified. Because now the tinkerman was carrying on with Mable just like he had with Roxy. Kissing her.

Like I said, everything was twin with Roxy and Mable. So now, Mable was kissing him back.

I darted into the shadow of the barn, bent low, and took off. As I slipped past the paddock fence I saw Roxy leaning over its corner, oblivious of me, staring at the pair across the creek.

It gave me nightmares. All night I seemed to be running barely ahead of snapping teeth that were trying to kiss me.

Next day Grandma told Grandpa that those tinkermen seemed to be hanging around a mighty long time, who'd think there would be that much in town to mend, wonder if they were fixing to settle down here and stay.

Later in the day I asked Grandma, "Do deaf-and-dumb ladies get married?"

"Land's sake, what put that idea in your head?"

"Well, all grown-up ladies can get married, can't they, they don't have to end up old maids like you said the girls would, do they?"

"I wouldn't trouble myself over things like that at your age."

"Well, do they?"

She never answered me. Just said, "Now mind, when you go for the milk don't you be asking questions like that, those girls can read lips. Hurt their feelings."

When the girls came in from milking that evening I looked close at Mable to see if she acted shiny like Roxy had after kissing the tinkerman. And she did, only dreamier, a smile slipping in and out on her face.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roxy wasn't smiling. Her full lips were bit tight, her eyes flat and still. I sat at the kitchen table, a cookie in my hand, tensed for when she would play her game and drop her teeth at me. She didn't. For the very first time I wanted her to, and motioned at my mouth, pointing at hers. She shook her head.

"I think maybe Roxy's coming down with something," Miss Abbie fretted. "She's always so full of fun, but today she won't talk, even acts like she's mad at Mable. Deliberately shoved her so's Mable's pail slopped milk all down her apron. Then tried to slap her like it was Mable's fault. And all the time Mable smiling sweet as an angel, like she understood Roxy wasn't herself. I thought maybe Roxy had a warm weather fever, but her cheeks were cool."

Tinkerman's kisses, that's what. I might have been only seven but I could figure that out. Only I wasn't about to tell Miss Abbie and get us all in trouble. Roxy was mad because her teeth dropped out in front of the tinkerman, and afterwards he kissed Mable instead of her. I felt real bad because it was the first time that everything wasn't twins with them. I felt so bad I told myself never to go near the tinkerman's camp anymore.

But in about a week curiosity got the best of me.

That night Grandma felt like singing all her old songs to me. Usually I loved her mournful singing of "The Drunkard's Lone Child," "The Little Brown Church in the Vale," and the sad ballad about the girl who hanged herself because a man married somebody else. But not on this night with the tinkerman's fire flickering down in the pasture and maybe both the girls already sneaking over to it. Which would he kiss tonight? Maybe both.

I played like I fell asleep against the porch post. And then I did. Grandma shook me awake, led me inside, and helped me undress. But the nap had taken the sleep out of me and now I was wide awake, tensed up to hear Grandma settle in bed and start her snoring.

The moon had changed and the night was dark when I left our yard. Instead of going to the barn I cut across the back end of the pasture, headed for a lone fence post which speared through a tangle of wild grape near the creek bank, the rest of the fence rotted and vanished long ago. I crept behind the tangle.

Down by the cow barn I saw first one shadow, then a second slip past its dark outlines. The first shadow reached the creek's bank. The second hung back, its stocky outlines telling me it was Roxy. The big tinkerman left the fire, walked to his side of the creek,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beckoned. Mable quickly knelt, took off her shoes, raised her skirt, dipped her bare feet in the water. She waded quickly across and stood beside the fire, skirt still held high, her white legs gleaming in the firelight.

Roxy waited, hesitant, staring at them.

In the flickering light and shadow of the fire, the tinkerman moved close to Mable, bent his head, put his hands on her shoulders. This galvanized Roxy into action. She bent over, began unlacing her shoes. The tinkerman looked over at her, suddenly lifted Mable in his arms, took long, fast steps with her toward the dark clump of woods that bordered the pasture.

Roxy, with her head bent down, fooling with her shoes, hadn't seen them leave. Her head still bent, she picked a careful way through the water. When she reached the fire, she stamped her feet, tossed up her head. And saw she was alone. Swung around, her head twisting and turning, fighting the darkness. At the last moment she saw the shadow-blurred figure of the tinkerman with Mable in his arms vanish into the impenetrable darkness of the woods.

Her enraged gargle rose up and down as she plunged after them, across the pasture, toward the woods. Then was absorbed into its blackness.

Roxy had been so loud that I feared Miss Abbie would hear and come running. Then the heavy thrashing and grunting sounds that came out of the stand of oak and black walnut trees took my mind clean off Miss Abbie or anything but those girls alone with the tinkerman. Was he killing them? Should I scream for Grandpa? Get my bottom blistered?

I ran along the creek to the woods, splashed knee-high through the water to the opposite bank. As I clambered up its slippery side the tinkerman bumped into me, backing out of the trees. He stared down at me, turned, and ran to his camp.

The violent thrashing inside the woods continued, twigs snapping, a heavy object falling, a pounding on the earth.

I hurried toward the sounds, bushes scratching and snagging me. Two flailing shadows, more sensed than seen, rolled and tumbled, in company with the crackling of snapping twigs and enraged grunting, at the foot of a big tree. I grabbed at one of the shadows. Felt the cloth of its dress yank free and the brush of its kicking feet. Desperately I felt around for a broken-off branch, found it, switched at the shadows. Hopeless. I tossed the little stick into the tangled bodies, turned, and ran for help.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I beat on Miss Abbie's back screen, yelling, "Hurry, hurry! The girls are killing each other!"

It seemed forever before she appeared on the back porch, stumbling with sleep. "Hurry, Miss Abbie! Roxy 'n Mable—they're out in the woods killing each other!"

She ran from the house, through the cow lot and the pasture, her white nightgown flapping, me at her heels. I took a quick look at the tinker camp. The old man was up, hurrying with the tinkerman to hitch up their horses.

As Miss Abbie and I neared the woods I could hear that the heavy thrashing had become a heavy thud, measured and steady. Miss Abbie plunged into the dark, following the sound. I could feel her body pull, slap, and at last fling the broader, chunkier shadow aside from the slimmer one lying on the ground. That broader shadow fell against me, tumbled to the ground. A grey film of light that sifted through tree branches revealed Roxy's teeth dangling palely across her mouth.

Miss Abbie shook the shadow still on the ground, half crying, half moaning, "Mable baby, wake up, dear God, oh, Mable! It's Abbie, wake up!"

No sound came from Mable. Miss Abbie stopped shaking her, sobbed, "She's killed her! Roxy's killed her own sister!"

In the distance wagon wheels creaked as they bumped unevenly across the pasture and onto the road.

Miss Abbie stood up, grabbed Roxy, yanked her over to Mable. Together they lifted the sagging body and staggered with it across the creek, me behind them. At the house they laid Mable on the porch until Miss Abbie could light the oil lamp, then carried her to her cot.

Mable's forehead was gashed, her face blood-streaked. Beneath that red rivulet she was still and white, eyes closed. Miss Abbie's hands waggled furiously in deaf-and-dumb talk and Roxy, her eyes large and frightened, ran to the kitchen, returned with a pan of water. She looked awful. Her teeth had fallen out somewhere in the woods or creek and her face had collapsed, as though she were swallowing herself to escape the terrible thing she had done.

"Run for your grandpa, Sary, have him fetch the doctor," Miss Abbie ordered. I ran.

You can imagine that our town did a lot of talking about what happened that night. Trying to figure out why Roxy had half killed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mable, pounding her head with a rock. Everybody kept at me, asking did I know what started such a ruckus and what on earth had made me get up in the night to catch those girls at it. And whyever were they out in the woods anyway.

Even at seven years old, maybe even especially at seven, you know when things ought to be a secret. So I said I'd heard our cat meowing, got up to let him in, and then heard the racket in the woods.

"Mighty odd those tinkermen packed up and left that same night," Grandma mused. "What in the name of sense would those girls be fighting over? Sure you don't know anything more about it, Sary?"

I shook my head.

When Mable got well she and Roxy didn't act like twins anymore, wouldn't even talk to each other except indirectly through Miss Abbie. Roxy never dropped her teeth at me either, because she never could find them even though she scrounged through the leaves in the woods and waded up and down the creek bed days on end looking for them. A heavy rain had fallen after that fight and the creek was running full, no telling where the teeth traveled.

Actually the only time those girls ever seemed happy anymore was when they played with the baby. Loved that baby together like they always had loved everything together before the fight. Certainly was lucky Miss Abbie had found that baby on their front doorstep one early morning and they decided to keep it. I don't see why whoever gave that baby away couldn't have just walked up the road a piece and left it at Grandma and Grandpa's house so it could be orphans with me; I needed somebody to play with. So cute, too, big black eyes, dark curly hair, a little boy kicking and gurgling if you tickled his stomach. "Brightest little thing, watches every move any of us make," Miss Abbie bragged. "And already spoiled rotten from all the attention he gets. I have to time those girls so's one don't hold him a minute more'n the other. I'll not stand any more squabbling around here."

"Whose baby is it?" I asked Miss Abbie one day when the girls had the baby outside in the yard for a breath of fresh air.

"The Lord's," she said.

"Well, why'd He pick your house to leave it? He could've sent it to our house just as well, couldn't He?"

She thought a minute, then said, "I reckon not. You see, the Lord's ways are His, real special, and we never figure out exactly where they're headed, or why. It's kind of a secret, the Lord's secret."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I love secrets," I said. "They're fun. Especially when they're about presents. Do you suppose that's why the Lord sent the baby here, giving you him as a present so Roxy and Mable would make up?"

Miss Abbie took kind of a deep breath, turned to look out the window at the girls sitting on a blanket in the yard, the baby between them. "Maybe so," she agreed. "Anyway, it's working."

MINUTE MYSTERY

SOMETHING FISHY

by KATE SEAGO

Peevy's luggage lay open on the Customs counter, his clothes and belongings tossed into a pile. "Nothing," the Customs inspector sniffed in disgust. "No drugs, no jewels, no contraband." He fixed Peevy with a suspicious eye. "What have you been up to this time, Mr. Peevy?"

Peevy turned his most genteel smile on the inspector. "I told you. I've been on a collecting trip." He held up a glass jar, and the brilliantly colored tropical fish inside flashed and darted in the light.

The inspector scowled.

Peevy shrugged.

A clerk scurried up and handed the inspector a slip of paper. "The office says it's okay, sir," the clerk whispered. "Nothing illegal about bringing a fighting fish into the country, as long as he has the proper paperwork."

Peevy held up a sheaf of papers. "Then I can go?"

The inspector nodded, scowling as he stood aside to let Peevy pass. Peevy scooped his clothes into his suitcases, gently cradled the jar, and made for the door.

"I still say there's something fishy about that guy," the customs inspector grumbled as Peevy hailed a cab.

Once the cab was safely on the expressway, Peevy held the fish up to the light again. He put his hand into the container, and his fingers closed on something transparent, almost invisible in the water. He fished the three marble-sized diamonds out of the gravel and pocketed them. Fishy, indeed! He smiled to himself as the cab headed for New Jersey.

© *1992 by Kate Seago.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

Robert Barnard is much loved by mystery fans for his wit and humor; but here he turns to a timely and very serious subject, the Romanian orphans—and the business of adoption . . .

A HOTEL IN BUCHAREST

by ROBERT BARNARD

The lift in the Harmonia had seemed slightly suspect when he had arrived the evening before, but Gerald risked it. He got to the first floor without mishap, and in the breakfast room he found a long table spread with cold meats and fish, two kinds of roll and plenty of bread, several different jams, and a toaster. It was not unlike the breakfast provided in any Scandinavian hotel. Gerald got a plateful of this and that, poured himself a cup of thick, black coffee, and settled down at a table.

"Is your wife not feeling up to breakfast?"

The question, startling him out of his thoughts, came from a woman at the table to his right. She had soft, brown hair, waved in a rather old-fashioned style, and a sympathetic smile. The man facing her across the table watched in a detached manner, as if he was used to her approaching strangers.

"I'm afraid I don't actually have a wife. I'm a widower."

"Oh—I *am* sorry. I do apologise. Robbie said there was another couple arriving yesterday evening, and I thought . . . Well, Tarom do their best, but they somehow don't manage to make people feel confident. And the airport is just a bit scary after dark."

"I'd certainly agree about *that*. . . . You said another couple?"

"Wanting to adopt one of the orphans. We always call them that, though most of them are abandoned, poor little mites."

© *1992 by Robert Barnard.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Light had dawned on Gerald. He had expected, having chosen a middle-priced hotel, that some of the guests there would be on that sad quest.

"Are there a lot of people here looking for a child to adopt?"

"Oh yes—quite a lot. All nationalities—French, German, Scandinavian. But the Harmonia prides itself on its British connections, going back to before the war. There are other sorts of British guest here too: journalists, businessmen, tourist people. . . ."

"Ah, I'm a tourist person," said Gerald, spreading a second roll with the rich, sweet jam that he had found very palatable. "And a journalist too. I'm going to do a series of articles for the *Yorkshire Post* on Romania—I live near York, by the way. What I'm really here for, though, is to scout around hotels and tourist venues. I'm thinking of starting up a specialist travel firm. Everyone who's been here since the revolution says the tourist potential is immense."

"Peasants," said the man unexpectedly. "The Balkans are the last place in Europe where you can find peasants."

He was in his late forties, wearing an anonymous suit and a college tie Gerald could not place. But the air of detachment, even of being nothing-very-much, was belied by sharp, living eyes.

"I don't think the Romanian government would be happy if we pushed the 'peasant' line too far," Gerald explained. "Though the folk element could come into it—in fact it always does in package tours. For some reason it makes people feel better about mass tourism."

"Well, it's nice to have met you," said the woman, standing up. "We must get on to another day of being passed from pillar to post. I'm Eileen Kershaw, by the way, and this is my husband Roland."

"How do you do. I'm Gerald Coutts."

"If you're not doing anything tonight, come up to the bar. We usually meet in the bar, to discuss progress, or lack of it. The Panorama Bar's on the top floor, and Radu the barman is very sweet, and knows us all."

"If I don't have anything on I'll come up," Gerald promised.

When he had finished the last drop of a second cup of coffee Gerald went back to the foyer and decided not to risk the lift back to the third floor. He still considered himself a young man: forty-two, and very little sign of running to fat. Gradually, though, as he trudged up the dimly lit stairwell, he became gripped by a feeling that he had known he was going to get at some time or other in Romania: the feeling of being watched. It persisted when he pushed the door

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through to the equally murky corridor on the third floor: one imagined Securitate men in rooms noting comings and goings, clocking up meetings in the corridors, playing through bugged conversations of hotel guests—everything managed, manipulated, as if the guests were forced to dance some ludicrous minuet to music from a manic party headquarters.

A door opened at the far end of the corridor. A young couple emerged, talking and laughing—she blonde, healthy, and tall, with a Valkyrie figure, he tanned, athletic, and handsome. The perfect Siegmund and Sieglinde, such as you can only conceive in your mind's eye, never see on the operatic stage. As they passed him Gerald heard the man say: "I've had worse at the Majestic in Tunbridge Wells," and their laughter echoed in the stairwell.

He shook off his feeling of oppression, of sinister watchers. Things had changed: this was now a world of normal people, a part of the new Europe.

His morning was spent with Ministry people and with people lower down in the tourist business. Everyone tried to be cooperative, though Gerald felt this was something new for them and they didn't really know how. The weather was glorious for October, and he ate lunch outside at the Athenée Palace. When he got back at late evening to the Harmonia he collected his passport from Reception along with his key.

"I'm sorry, we still 'ave to check—just like the old days."

The clerk who handed it over was a broad, plump man with a jolly smile that seemed to hide a congenital melancholy.

"Don't mention it. Hotels in most European countries check passports."

"Really? We do not know, you see."

"Dare I risk the lift up to the Panorama Bar?"

" 'E's been mended today. Use 'im while 'e is 'ealthy!"

The lift opened straight out into the bar, which had a splendid view over the uncertain lights of Bucharest, and which was ringing with laughter and conversation. The presiding genius was Radu, the roly-poly barman, who seemed to set the relaxed tone of the place. English couples were mixing and swapping experiences with couples of other nationalities, and the single people—doubtless the businessmen and journalists the Kershaws had mentioned—formed their own little groups. Eileen and Roland Kershaw hailed him, and he went over to talk to them. They were round a table with the Wagnerian couple he had passed in the corridor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We saw our baby today!" said Eileen triumphantly. "I held her!"

"Has she got a name?"

"Elena. It's a lovely name, isn't it? We're not going to change it to Helen. We want her to know she's Romanian. We'll bring her back here when she's older, so she always feels at home. Oh—this is Ursula Upjohn and Edward Upjohn."

"Ed," said the Siegmund young man. He didn't seem like an Ed. They both were so young and vital and healthy that it was odd to think of them as unable to have children—and difficult to think of a reason why they shouldn't adopt. Perhaps they wanted a baby—there were very few of those available for adoption in Britain, Gerald knew. Anyway, it hardly seemed polite to ask.

"How are things going with you?" he asked Ursula.

"Oh, we're at about the same stage as Eileen and Roland. We *hope*—fingers crossed—to be able to take Mihai home next visit."

"I suppose things are never certain, never clear-cut."

"Never, ever," said Ed feelingly.

"That's why we're so lucky to have Robbie," said Ursula. "He's fantastic. If there's a way of getting round problems, or a way of cutting through red tape, Robbie will find it."

"There he is now," said Roland. "That must be the new couple."

When Robbie had emerged from the lift, half the heads in the room had turned in his direction—some with a sort of starved hope in their eyes, rather as those with a need for faith will feast on some cut-price messiah. But there was nothing shifty or bargain-basement about Robbie. He was a clean-cut man in his mid-forties, in a smart, claret-coloured blazer, carrying five or six files. He had smiles all round, but he made initially for a couple sitting a little aside from the rest, not yet fully integrated. The man was cherubic, almost boyish, with blond curly hair and a wicked smile. Certainly he could be no more than thirty. His wife was a woman of forty-odd, hair cut short and starting to go grey, dressed in a severely cut suit. Something executive in local government, Gerald guessed.

"That's Laura Perceval," said Ursula. "And Terry. They were out at the Ploesti orphanage this afternoon."

"You should have brought them over and introduced them," said Eileen. "You're not doing your duty."

"Yes, I should. They seemed awfully nice. From Derbyshire, I think."

Tactfully nobody mentioned the discrepancy in their ages. No prizes for guessing why they couldn't adopt in Britain, Gerald

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought. Robbie was questioning them—first one, then the other, turning his face to look into theirs, the couple leaning forward, interested, concerned, questioning in their turn.

"Robbie always takes new couples to the Ministry on their first morning," said Ed. "They're used to people from Romchild—that's our organisation. Then he leaves them on their own—with a little sheet of suggested steps. It's a sort of throwing-in at the deep end."

"We've seen one! We've found one, we think!"

The cry was from another new couple, and was the signal for congratulations, backslappings, toasts. The groupings were breaking up, and Gerald took advantage of the interruption to slip away. The new couple was a thick-set, rubicund Yorkshire businessman, Mike Lawson, with a strong but pleasant accent, and his wife Mareeka, a beautiful Indian woman, wearing a sari, with a sophisticated Southern accent and limitless charm.

"He's a champion little fellow," Gerald heard Mike say, grinning happily.

"Well, you've *really* got reason to wear your sari tonight," Eileen said to Mareeka. So she didn't always, Gerald thought: she was in that interesting hinterland between East and West. Hinterlands were always fascinating. Come to that, post-Ceausescu's Romania was one. Gerald introduced himself to one of the journalists and was soon chatting to him and a London businesswoman who joined them about topics of common interest. But he was fascinated by the couples and kept his eye on them all evening, watching Robbie go from one couple to another—interested, encouraging, concerned—and finally end up the centre of an adoring, immensely jolly group. He was, it seemed, a source of hope, a beacon of light.

In the next few days Gerald seemed to get busier and busier, and was soon taking off from Bucharest in a hired car, earmarking possible routes and goals for future trips. There was, as he had expected, immense tourist potential, combined with next to no knowledge of the imperatives of mass tourism. There were possibilities everywhere he went that kept him constantly excited. But he usually found himself back at the Harmonia in the evening and enjoying a drink in the Panorama Bar. Here he could follow the progress and disappointments of the various couples, and admire the way Robbie would go around raising spirits and suggesting ways round or through the roadblocks that officialdom erected.

"You do a wonderful job," he said to him one evening.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm a Northerner," said Robbie. "In Pontefract we don't take no for an answer."

"How often does it take a bribe to change a 'no' to 'yes'?"

Robbie winked.

"It's the last resort. Officially it's against Romchild's principles. We don't like doing it because if we did it too readily we'd be doing it all the time. But now and then . . ."

Gerald spoke to the newest couple one morning over breakfast. Laura and Terry Perceval, he had noticed, were always very purposeful, eating and drinking while they were planning their day and their next moves, and making notes in a little black book. If Terry had the looks of a toyboy, he didn't seem to behave like one.

"The trouble with social services people in Britain," said Laura briskly, after they had chatted for a bit and got round to the inevitable topic, "is that they can't see beyond their noses. And because of the press they're scared stiff of making the slightest mistake. They don't want to know about anything outside their own little boundaries. You tell them that the situation for orphans here is desperate and they shrug."

"And believe me, it is desperate," said Terry. "We've only scraped the surface, but we *know*."

"Because they're so scared of the press they try to live in an ideal world," Laura went on. "Model two-parent families, him older than her, he in a job, she at home, black parents for black children. . . ."

"Life is a lot messier than that," said Terry. "There are different sorts of relationships. And people with no relationships who would make excellent parents."

"But you have to have some kind of certificate of fitness to take your baby into Britain when the time comes, don't you?" Gerald asked.

"Oh yes," said Terry. "Usually."

"We have ours," said Laura firmly.

"I suppose you suffered a lot of prying to get it?"

"Sheer bloody impertinence," she replied, her mouth set in a grim line.

Most of the couples seemed to spend two or three weeks at a time in Romania, then return home and consolidate their position by postal or telephone contacts (though the latter were very difficult). The more experienced ones like Eileen and Roland Kershaw obviously had a whole lot of other couples in England to contact, compare notes with, support. While they were in Romania much of the cou-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ples' time was spent waiting, or was just filled up in some way or other. Gerald went to a concert at the Atheneum and in the interval, when it was the done thing to promenade around the entrance hall under the great dome, Gerald met up with Mike Lawson and Edward Upjohn.

"Mareeka wouldn't come," said Mike, in his broad Yorkshire accent. "Says that every movement in Mahler's too long by ten minutes."

"She'd be well advised not to say that anywhere near the Festival Hall," said Gerald. "She might get lynched."

"Ursula's a medieval music freak," said Ed. "And I'm a philistine. I jog to Nigel Kennedy pops on my personal stereo, and lift weights to the best of James Last. I came along because there was a spare ticket."

"I think of you as a rather Wagnerian couple," said Gerald. "Fighting dragons and defending holy grails."

"Sorry to disappoint you. A propos, do you want to walk back with us? The streets are so dark, and there've been a lot of muggings."

"Really? I've felt perfectly safe. But I'd be happy to walk back with you."

When they got back to the Harmonia they found Robbie poring over passports and papers with the friendly receptionist, both very serious as befitted people engaged in satisfying the diktats of bureaucracy. Robbie waved.

"See you in the Panorama," he shouted.

"You missed Mahler's Sixth," said Gerald to Mareeka in the bar, where she was sipping a brandy. "It was very good."

"I'm rather like Ursula," said Mareeka coolly. "Anything later than Haydn is a bit suspect. Beethoven was a big mistake, and even Mozart sometimes went too far."

The next day Gerald directed his car up to Sinaia. Everyone had told him it was one of the inevitable goals of any package tour he might put together, and they were right. The summer palace of the Hohenzollern kings was the copywriter's dream: a series of buildings in baronial-feudal style, set in the mountain's side, the interiors darkly wooden but grandiose—the headquarters of Herne the Hunter. The place was, Gerald noted, quite innocent of the needs of tourism: there was not a postcard in sight, nor a guidebook, and supervision was minimal. He felt both wonder and some compunction at the changes tours like the ones he was planning would bring.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As he came out blinking into the sunlight and headed towards the lodge which had served as a writers' retreat for the hymners of Ceausescu's greatness, Gerald suddenly paused in his stride: that feeling had come upon him again, that feeling of being watched. Eerie. He shook himself: probably it was some sort of transference from the old days, for the writers when they were up here must have had a close eye kept on them for any sign of backsliding from a posture of total devotion to the Great Conducator.

The feeling evaporated as soon as it came. He saw Eileen Kershaw approaching from the lodge and waving.

"Hello! You never said you were coming up here."

"Oh, I'm going all over."

"Mareeka's around somewhere. She hasn't seen it. This is my second visit. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Absolutely wonderful."

"And just waiting for package tourists."

Gerald smiled wryly.

"You make it sound rather dreadful. I'm hoping to have small, discriminating groups."

"I'm sure you are. And it will do so much good to the economy. But it won't be quite the same, will it?"

"Not quite. But Romania has been so cut off. The more connections it has with the rest of Europe, the better."

"That's right," said Mareeka, who had just strolled over from the direction of the palace. "We need to get people interested in the place. They were at the time of the revolution, but then it sort of tailed off. People's attention span seems to get shorter and shorter. But the Romanians are so anxious to learn how things are done in the West."

"That's not absolutely an unmixed blessing," said Eileen. "Somebody had her handbag snatched back near the restaurant an hour ago. Just like Florence or Rome. They say things like that hardly ever happened before the revolution."

"Under Ceausescu nobody had anything worth stealing," said Gerald. "I still feel a lot safer here in Romania than I would on the streets of London or Edinburgh."

But the topic of crime pursued him during his remaining days in Romania—tales of muggings in the nearly unlit streets of nighttime Bucharest, tales of the illegal money-changers turning nasty and demanding Western currency with menaces, rumours that the miners were poised to come back to the capital, with stories of what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they had done the last time they took over the streets there. The couples were becoming more uneasy, or perhaps using the stories to justify themselves in taking children from that environment. Gerald saw no evidence himself of any rising tide of crime, and rather mocked all their stories. Then, two days before he was due to return home, he heard that the receptionist at the Harmonia, the man he had spoken to on his second day, had been knifed on his way home and killed.

"It's not as though he was likely to be carrying the takings home with him," said Mike Lawson. "It's just horrible and senseless."

For Gerald, though, the trip had gone well. Officialdom, slowly and uncertainly, had opened up under his persistent negotiating techniques: arrangements had been come to, promises made, itineraries scheduled. The more he had seen of the country, the more wonderful it seemed. Whatever one's doubts about mass tourism, it had to be a good thing to open up such beauty and interest to sympathetic travellers.

For some of the couples, too, things were going well. Roland and Eileen, as they had hoped, were firming in on their prospects of adopting Elena. They had been assured that their next trip would be their last, and they could then take her home with them. Terry and Laura Perceval—perhaps aided by Laura's experience in government, which was in fact at national level rather than the local level which Gerald had guessed at—had a definite prospect of adoption on their first trip, something of a record. They showed round photographs in the Panorama Bar of Laura holding the tiny baby girl at the door of the orphanage, with Terry leaning over her shoulder and tweaking the laughing baby's nose. It all seemed so good, so beneficial, so normal. Gerald left with many good wishes and some promises that at some time in the future many of them, with their children, would come on one of his tours.

In the months that followed, Gerald went several times to Romania, but he never spent more than one night at the Harmonia. He was investigating Cluj, Timisoara, Constanta, and he always flew on to one or other of the towns next day, after the ritual meetings with Ministry or tourism officials. On one of his overnight stays he found Laura and Terry Perceval at the Harmonia, and heard that things were progressing well with their adoption. On another occasion he found Robbie there, but he was so busy with the affairs of new couples whom he was helping over the difficult first hurdles that Gerald didn't manage to do more than swap a few words of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

greeting with him. On his last visit before the first of the tours was scheduled to take place, he found Mike Lawson behind him in the airport queue to take the plane home.

"Great to see you again. Where's Mareeka?" he asked.

"She didn't come this time. This was just a quick 'sorting-out' visit, to see some Ministry troublemakers."

"Successful?"

"Very. The next trip is going to be *the* one."

When he'd gone through the formalities Gerald waited for Mike as he checked his luggage through, but Mike opted to go Smoking.

"Didn't realize you did," said Gerald.

"We Yorkshiremen have all the vices, and damn the busybodies who want to make us live healthily and forever. Actually, it's the strain of this business. I was down to one or two a day, but I'm well up again now."

It was after his first tour had taken place, and been a glorious success, that Gerald found a brief lull in his life. The topic of the Romanian "orphans," though no longer hot news, was never entirely out of it: obstructive local authorities in Britain who regarded the adoptions with disapproval; a couple who had found "bonding" impossible with their adopted child; a couple who had smuggled their baby in. The journalist in Gerald had been dormant for a time, and it now reasserted itself. How had the couples that he had come to know so well fared with their adopted children? There was certainly a story there, maybe three or four.

It was just a question of getting in touch, because there had been no exchange of addresses. Robbie, he knew, came from Pontefract, but as his surname was Taylor tracking him down might be difficult. He seemed to remember the Percevals came from Derbyshire, but he wasn't sure which town. The Kershaws he thought came from Luton (how awful—to adopt a child and bring it up in Luton!), and the Upjohns from London somewhere. Mike Lawson's luggage he had seen at the airport in Bucharest. He could not remember the address, but it had been Huddersfield, and he knew Mike was in the carpet business. It was with Mike, obviously, that he should make a start. When he drove to Huddersfield a couple of days later he found the firm in the Yellow Pages, but when he rang he was told that Mike was away on a buying trip to London.

"Stupid of me. I should have rung in advance. Do you think you could give me his home number?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The reason he had not tried to contact Mike and Mareeka in advance was his journalist's instinct that the truest picture comes from a surprise visit: no time to prepare a false impression. He knew from all those press reports that some of the adoptions had been deliriously successful, others less so. He compared the number with the four M. Lawsons in the telephone book and drove out to the address. There was a good chance, he felt, that Mareeka, with the new baby, would be at home.

The house was a substantial stone one, probably late-Victorian, with a small front garden onto the street, land stretching out to the back, and a row of semis forming the rest of the street. Not at all a bad place in which to bring up a child. Gerald was disappointed, though, to get no response to his ring on the doorbell.

"They're both out," came a cry from next door. An elderly man, wrinkled and weather-beaten, was clipping his hedge in the nearest of the semis. "I think Mike is in London for a few days."

Gerald went over.

"Yes, they told me he was away on business at the shop. I thought his wife might be in."

The man stopped clipping.

"His wife? Mr. Lawson doesn't have a wife."

"But Mareeka . . . Oh, perhaps they're not married."

"Who? Never heard of a name like that. Mr. Lawson's never been married, and there's no woman has lived here since his mother died. Oh—it wouldn't be young Edward's wife you'd be looking for, would it?"

"Edward?"

"His nephew Ed. He's been living with Mike for a bit. He's divorced from his wife, Mike says, and he's just got custody of their child. He's home most of the day since the little boy came, but he's shopping in Leeds today. Was it his wife you were looking for? She's never lived here, to my knowledge."

"No, it . . . it wasn't her. I think I've made a mistake."

On the way home Gerald stopped at a pub on the outskirts of the town, bought lunch and a pint, and tried to think things through. What he had seen in Bucharest had been an elaborate facade and charade. Robbie Taylor was running an organisation to help people—well-heeled people, no doubt—who had no chance, or next to none, of adopting in Britain. So Mike and Ed were partners, and had set up a quite different facade here in Huddersfield to account for their lives together. And if they—seen at the concert—were part-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ners, most probably Eileen and Mareeka—seen at Sinaia—were partners too. And the rest? Was it Roland Kershaw and Terry, and Laura Perceval and Ursula? Gerald sat pondering.

He had felt great sympathy for the couples. He and his wife had had no children, though they were only beginning to talk of adoption or fostering when his wife became ill. But adoption of the kind that Robbie was organising presented issues of conscience that he had never considered except in passing, and he recognised that now he was forced to wrestle with them in earnest. Was it in the child's interest—even granted the dreadful conditions in some of the orphanages—to be adopted by a homosexual couple? What if, in some cases, they were paedophiles?

He was still muddled, thrashing around, when he got home. It seemed like an omen to find a thick Ministry letter from Romania on his doormat, and more of an omen still when he opened it: the Ministry officials were impressed and delighted by the success of the tour, and wanted to have discussions aimed at publicising them more widely and making them more frequent. It was all Gerald needed to make up his mind: he checked his diary, then got on to Tarom at once to book a flight and a room at the Harmonia.

The plane was late out of Heathrow as usual. When Gerald finally made it to his hotel room he had little energy left for a visit to the Panorama. The next day was spent in talks at the Ministry, talks which alternated between the exhilarating and the frustrating as usual, but there was the difference this time that the atmosphere was notably more friendly. He ate early at the Athenée Palace, hoping in vain to avoid the cabaret, and then went back to the Harmonia.

"Is Mr. Taylor staying here at the moment?" he asked the new clerk at Reception, handsome and smiling.

"Robbie? Oh yes, he's here. He's always coming and going. It's room four-oh-eight."

Upstairs the Panorama Bar was full of couples, and Radu welcomed him as a returned friend. Gerald found a businessman he knew to talk to, and watched. All the couples—or "couples," as he thought of them now—were new, but they were going through the same routines which by now Gerald knew so well: welcoming newcomers, encouraging the downhearted, comparing notes. And there too was Robbie, smartly dressed as always, going from couple to couple, files in hand, helping, directing, cheering. This was not the place, Gerald thought, to talk to him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was after eleven, when all the couples had accepted his benediction and exhortation and drifted off, that Robbie left the bar. Gerald gave him ten minutes, then went down to 408. The "Come in" was firm and confident.

"Oh, hello. I saw you were back."

"I wonder if we could have a chat."

"Sure."

"You see, I went over to Huddersfield to see Mike and Mareeka."

There was barely a flicker of the eyelids. Robbie looked up at him guilelessly, a small smile playing on his lips, utterly confident. Godlike, Gerald thought suddenly.

"Oh yes. Mike phoned and told me that someone had been there. Why don't you sit down?"

Tentatively Gerald took the other chair.

"So you see, I know all about this outfit of yours."

"Do you?"

"Know that it's all a sham. How do you manage it? Forged passports?"

"Yes."

"Forged certificates of suitability for adopting?"

"Sometimes. There are other ways with the private agencies, and sometimes with the Social Services people as well."

"All to put through dubious adoptions for your own profit. I suppose Eileen and Mareeka are a couple, are they?"

"They are, as a matter of fact. Does it bother you?"

"No, it doesn't. But that's not the point. And Roland and Terry, I suppose? And Laura and Ursula?"

Robbie laughed out loud.

"Sorry, old boy. You really don't know all about us after all. No, no: Laura and Terry are a couple."

Gerald was nonplussed for a moment.

"Oh? Why can't they adopt in Britain? The age difference?"

"Not exactly. You see, they are brother and sister."

"Oh . . . . And Roland?"

"Roland is a bachelor—a quiet man who's lived alone all his life, and would now like to adopt a child. And Ursula is married—to a man with multiple sclerosis. They are comfortably off, and Ursula doesn't see why she should forego the pleasure of having a child. So you see, it's not as simple as you thought."

"No."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And yet Gerald was not sure that this new information made him feel less uneasy. Not with Robbie sitting there, that smile of self-approval playing on his lips. He was playing God: reversing nature, righting wrongs, changing woe to bliss. And doing so to immense applause—from the people he aided, but also from himself. What sort of effect did playing God have on a man's character? Gerald brought the matter bluntly into the open.

"What gives you the right to play God?"

"You get me wrong. I don't play God." But he brushed aside the accusation with a scorn that was Olympian. "I am simply the facilitator. I make things possible."

"So what makes you think you know better than the trained social worker?"

"I know better because I don't have their narrow view of human potential."

"How wonderful that sounds! But you do it for money."

"Partly. Romchild does make a modest profit. But mostly I do it to make people happy. There's too little happiness around."

"And if you found that one of your . . . clients was a paedophile? Or a sadist?"

"I'd call the whole thing off. I do have a policeman friend who is very good about checking if I have that suspicion. . . ." He leaned forward and raised his voice, like a politician. "But when you think how many heads of children's homes and foster parents have been found to have abused the children in their care in recent years, do you think your famous 'trained social workers' do so very much better than me?"

It was a telling point. Gerald acknowledged it by standing up, irresolute, uneasy.

"I don't know . . . I'll have to think."

"And what might you do?"

"Go to the British police. You've done several things that are against British law."

Robbie shook his head.

"I don't really think you're the sort of person who's so hidebound and prejudiced that you'd want to stop me taking these children from the dreadful conditions they're living in. Have you seen any of them? They're vegetables where they are. And in Britain, in the homes I find for them, they're happy, laughing, normal children. I've seen it. Women of forty-odd have children every day the world over. Why shouldn't they adopt? Men bring up children on their own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the time when their wives die or run out on them. Why shouldn't they adopt? Yes, and homosexual couples too—why should they be denied that joy?"

It all made so much sense. It was just that Gerald, leaning against the hotel room door, distrusted that air of omniscience, that limitless self-approbation, that God-like confidence.

And as he leant his head against the door another picture came into Gerald's mind: of Robbie at the Reception desk, his head and the Reception clerk's bent over, studying passports, serious, worried. And he remembered all that talk—orchestrated? a sort of preparation?—about a rising tide of crime. And he remembered that genial, sad, ordinary man, knifed in the dark streets as he went home from work.

"You're quite right," he said, keeping his voice as steady as possible. "You're doing work that needs doing. You won't hear any more from me."

Once clear of the room, in the dark stairwell that had given him such an eerie sensation of being watched even on his first day, he stopped and put his forehead against the stone wall. He had still no idea what he was going to do. He did not know whether he had been believed or not. And if he had not been, he did not know how far Robbie would go to keep him quiet. He had entered one of those hinterlands which once he had found so interesting, so exciting. And he did so very much wish he hadn't.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* short story by

IAN STUART

A retired manager of a London branch of Barclays Bank, Ian Stuart continues to write mysteries that draw upon the Golden Age tradition he so admired as a young reader of crime fiction. He has some dozen novels to his credit, but, happily, he has not abandoned the short mystery form, at which he also excels. . . .

MISS CRINDLE AND THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

by IAN STUART

"Miss Cwindle, Miss Cwindle! Look at my weindeer!"

Lucy Hopkins was only five, and she had difficulty with her R's. She was almost jumping up and down now with excitement, which didn't help.

Miss Crindle stopped pondering the respective merits of minced beef and fish for her supper that evening. Neither of them appealed to her very much. In fact, regarded in the cold light of Much Cluning High Street on a raw December morning, both were revolting. She smiled at the little girl. "Isn't he a beauty?" she said. "What do you call him?"

"Wudolph," Lucy answered.

"Quite right, too," Miss Crindle agreed approvingly. "That's a proper name for a reindeer." He really was a very splendid creature, she thought. Soft and cuddly, with a bright red nose, big, appealing eyes, and bendy antlers.

Lucy's mother smiled apologetically. "He's an early Christmas present," she explained.

© *1992 by Ian Stuart.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miss Crindle thought what a satisfactory young woman Mary Jones had grown into. She had been a nice girl when she taught her at Much Cluning Junior School. Almost too quiet, but with the hint of a strong character. Now she was—what, twenty-six or -seven?—and while she was still quiet, her strength of character was more apparent. She was pretty, too, in an unassuming way. Miss Crindle smiled back.

"Who gave him to you?" she asked Lucy.

"My daddy."

"Well, he's lovely." Miss Crindle wondered how Evan Hopkins could afford such a splendid present—there couldn't be much spare cash in that household—and told herself it was none of her business. Evan was a good lad, and devoted to his family.

He had always been like that. Only when he was a little boy, his devotion had been directed at his older brother. Tom wasn't very bright. He was two years older and a lot bigger than Evan, who was still well below average height now and lightly built, but the younger boy had taken on the role of protector, and woe betide any boy who dared bait or try to bully Tom.

Inevitably, as they grew up the relationship had changed. Twice Evan had been in trouble with the police. Not for anything very serious. The second time was after he had torn into the ringleader of a group of yobs who had been making disparaging remarks about Tom and broken his nose.

Miss Crindle had been a little concerned when Tom married Kathy Davies; Kathy was tough and ambitious, and it seemed to Miss Crindle that they were ill suited to each other. She wondered what Kathy had seen in Tom. But both wives seemed to have had a good effect on their husbands. Kathy had seen that Tom stuck to his job at Webber Transport's depot in Little Cluning and had put a little of her own steel into his character, while Mary had been a calming influence on Evan. It was a long time now since he had been in trouble.

"Ee-aw," Lucy said. "Ee-aw."

Her mother laughed. "I don't think that's the sort of noise reindeer make, is it, Miss Crindle?" she said. Lucy was squeezing Rudolph to see if he would make any noise himself, and Mary added quietly, a sad look coming into her eyes, "He's the first real present she's had for ages."

Miss Crindle nodded understandingly. "It sounds more like a donkey to me," she said for Lucy's benefit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ee-aw," Lucy repeated defiantly.

The women laughed and Mary led her daughter away.

Miss Crindle looked in the butcher's window and decided she would have two lamb chops.

Not much ever happened to ruffle the even tenor of life in Much Cluning, and the robbery at Bontlas Hall was the talk of the neighbourhood. The Hall was old, not large enough to be described as a mansion, and beginning to crumble a little at the edges, but it was still one of the grandest houses in the district. The Routledges, who owned it, had been away in Spain for a month, and the house was unoccupied. They possessed one or two fairly valuable paintings and a few good pieces of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century silver, but according to local reports, the burglar, or burglars, had left them and taken only a thousand pounds in cash and some Christmas presents the Routledges had bought for their family and friends.

They had discovered the break-in when they returned a week before Christmas. The window of Colonel Routledge's study was broken and the carpet just inside littered with shards of glass. When the police arrived, the colonel and his wife were able to provide them with a list of what was missing. Among the presents for their grandchildren was an expensive stuffed toy reindeer with a bright red nose.

"Looks like an amateur job," Detective-Sergeant Plumley observed to the D.C. with him. "A pro might not have nicked the paintings, but he wouldn't have left all that silver." He sighed disgustedly.

"I wonder who knew about the cash," D.C. Mitchell mused. "Odd, leaving so much in the house if it was going to be empty."

Plumley shrugged. "People are funny about money," he observed sagely. "You'll know that when you've been in this job as long as I have." He thought of his grandmother who, although perfectly normal in other ways, had always kept fifty pounds concealed about her person. "You never know what'll happen, I might need it one day," she had explained to her daughter, Plumley's mother. She never had needed it, and when she died they found the notes stuffed in her underwear.

The colonel, it appeared, had adhered to the same theory.

The police searched the house and grounds, but apart from some smudged fingerprints which showed only that the burglar had worn gloves, they found only one useful piece of evidence. The Welsh

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Borders normally have more than their share of rainfall, but that December was unusually dry. Indeed, it hadn't rained in Much Cluning for more than a fortnight, and the footprint under the study window was still clear.

"Do you notice anything about it?" Plumley asked Mitchell.

"Nothing much," Mitchell confessed.

"It's small, man." The sergeant's Welshness became more evident when he was irritated or excited. "About size six, if that."

"I saw *that*," Mitchell said.

"So why did you say you hadn't noticed anything? And that's not all, boy. It must have been made after we had all that rain or it'd have been washed away. What day was that?"

Mitchell thought. "Thursday week," he said. "A fortnight tomorrow."

"That makes it the fourth. And it can't have been too soon after, or it wouldn't have kept its shape like that. It would have crumbled. The ground doesn't dry too fast in this weather; I reckon Jimmy was here on the sixth or maybe the night of the fifth." Plumley allowed himself a moment's satisfaction.

Mitchell looked over his shoulder to ensure nobody was within earshot. "That cash, Skip," he ventured. "You don't think the old boy's making it up, do you? For the insurance, like?"

The sergeant regarded him with horrified distaste. "Colonel Routledge?" he demanded. "You don't know what you're talking about, man. You wouldn't find a straighter man anywhere than him." Plumley's tone was enough to intimidate a tougher man than his subordinate. Then he added, "But you did right to think of it."

Mitchell was partly mollified.

"The first thing is to find out who knew they kept all that cash," the sergeant went on. "They wouldn't have broadcast it. This was a local man."

At first Colonel Routledge and his wife were reluctant to concede that anyone could have known they kept so much money in the house. Finally they conceded that Mrs. Hines, the woman who came in from the village to do most of the cleaning when they were at home, might have known.

"But she's worked for us for years," Mrs. Routledge protested. "She's as honest as the day."

Even honest women talked, Plumley reflected. Often quite innocently. "Have you had reason to sack anybody lately?" he enquired.

"No, nobody," they answered in unison.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There isn't anyone else you can think of?"

"Well, I suppose Marshall might have found out," the colonel answered reluctantly. "He's our gardener and odd-job man."

Mrs. Routledge looked so grimly disapproving that Plumley suspected she didn't like Marshall.

The policemen left the old couple to cope as best they could.

"We'll talk to those two, then we'll see if anybody round here's been spending more than usual lately," Plumley told Mitchell.

"Or trying to sell those toys," Mitchell suggested.

Plumley nodded.

Olive Hines had just arrived for work, and they found her in the kitchen. She was a plump, homely woman, and looking at her the sergeant could understand the Routledges' insistence that she was reliable: honesty seemed to surround her like an aura. She had been shocked to learn about the burglary, and when Plumley asked whether she had known about the money, she admitted at once that she had. When he asked if she might have inadvertently mentioned it to anyone else, she said she was sure she wouldn't have done such a thing. But she looked flustered.

An amiable gossip, Plumley decided.

Marshall only worked at the Hall three days a week and the policemen found him at his council house in Little Cluning, tinkering with his motorbike. He was a small, weasely man of about forty. He denied knowing that the Routledges kept large amounts of cash in the house, but Plumley noticed his shifty manner when he answered and thought he was probably lying. He claimed that he had been at home on the night of December the fifth and at work at Leobury all the next day. Take it or leave it, his manner said.

"We'll check that, then we'll go round the pubs to see if anybody's been trying to flog those toys," the sergeant told Mitchell as they got back into their car. He was reflecting that Marshall had noticeably small feet.

There was no need for them to go round the pubs. When P.C. Roberts at Much Cluning heard about the stolen reindeer he said at once, "There's a kiddie in the village has one of them. I saw her in the High Street with it yesterday."

"Who is she?" Plumley demanded.

"Lucy Hopkins," Roberts replied.

"I bought it in a pub," Evan said. He was worried, Plumley thought.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Which pub?" he asked. He had noticed the pause before the younger man answered. Probably guessed it had come off the back of a lorry, the price he'd paid for it, he told himself.

Again Evan hesitated. "The Fox at Leobury," he said at last.

"You're sure about that?" Evan nodded. "Who did you buy it from?"

"A bloke."

"What bloke?"

"I don't know, I'd never seen him before. He had these toys he was selling, said he was a market trader and he had them left over and he wanted to get shot of them before Christmas. They were cheap, and Lucy hadn't had a decent present for yonks, so I bought it."

"How much did you give him for it?"

Another hesitation, shorter this time. "Seven quid," Evan said.

"You must have known it was worth a lot more than that."

"I told you, he wanted to get rid of them. It sounded all right."

"Can you describe him?" Mitchell asked, speaking for the first time.

"He was just an ordinary bloke."

"Young, old, tall, short, fat, thin?"

"Youngish. I didn't take much notice."

"What day was this?"

Evan thought. "About ten days ago."

Plumley looked at the other man's feet. "What size shoes do you take?" he asked.

"Sixes. Why?"

"Just routine," the sergeant told him. "Where were you on the fifth and sixth of this month?"

"How do I know? That's nearly two weeks ago."

"You'd better think."

"Why?"

"Just answer the question."

Evan tried to remember. "At home," he said at last.

"With anybody?"

"My wife and Lucy. The sixth was a Friday, right? Mary wasn't well, and I took a day off work. Look, what's all this about?"

Plumley told him.

He and Mitchell drove back to Leobury and went to see the landlord at the Fox, a small pub near the Cross. Except at weekends, Ben Dawson and his wife ran it without help. They both knew Evan Hopkins by sight, but they couldn't remember his coming in lately.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nor had either of them seen anybody selling stuffed toys in the bars, or anything else for that matter. They had a good reputation in the town, and the two policemen thanked them and left.

"So that's it," Mitchell said.

"Yes," Plumley agreed. "Hopkins is our man all right. Either he or his wife probably knows Mrs. Hines and she happened to mention the money one day when they were chatting." He was glad to have the case resolved, it would be a mark in his favour and the Routledges would be pleased. "Let's have a pint and something to eat before we go back."

Miss Crindle met Mary and Lucy Hopkins coming out of the post office the next morning. It was the first time she had seen them since Lucy had shown her Rudolph, and she stopped to have a word with Mary. It was clear that the young woman had been crying.

"Hallo, Mary," she said. "Where's Rudolph today, Lucy?"

"They took him," the child mumbled. Tears started in her eyes and ran slowly down her cheeks.

Miss Crindle frowned. "Who took him?" she enquired, looking at Mary.

"The police," Mary answered bitterly. "Haven't you heard?"

"No." Miss Crindle was puzzled. She had heard about the burglary at Bontlas Hall and the money that had been taken, but she knew nothing about the stolen toys.

Mary explained. "It's not true," she finished. "Evan didn't do it. He wouldn't, however hard up we were."

"No, he wouldn't," Miss Crindle agreed. Evan might have been a bit hot tempered and unruly when he was a lad; he had never been a thief.

"They kept him at the police station last night," Mary said miserably. "They say he'll be in court on Thursday."

Today was Tuesday, Miss Crindle thought. "Tell me everything you know, Mary," she said. "Where he was those two days, why they think he did it, everything."

But apart from his being with her at the crucial time—and even then they hadn't been together all the while—all Mary knew was that Evan said he had bought Rudolph from a man in the Fox at Leobury.

"I'll see if there's anything I can do," Miss Crindle told her. "And try not to worry, Mary."

The girl smiled wanly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miss Crindle had no idea what she could do, apart from speaking up for Evan's good character, but she felt she must do something. She posted her last Christmas cards and caught the afternoon bus into Leobury. She owned a car, but she didn't really like driving and only did so when there was no alternative. Alighting at the Cross, she made her way to the police station and asked to see whoever was in charge of the enquiries into the burglary at Bontlas Hall.

Plumley had heard about Miss Crindle from P.C. Roberts at Much Cluning and he knew that Detective Chief Inspector Haddow thought highly of her shrewdness and her local knowledge. Not to put too fine a point on it, she had steered the police in the right direction more than once. So he treated her approach with more respect than he would have done otherwise.

"I quite understand that it's no use my telling you that I've known Evan Hopkins since he was a baby and he's not a thief," she said in her matter-of-fact way. "However, I should be grateful if you would tell me what evidence you have against him."

Plumley pondered her request. He had expected a thin, sharp old bird, not this big, rather clumsy-looking woman wrapped up in shapeless clothes. Whatever she might choose to think, he was satisfied he had the burglar safe behind bars downstairs. He was well pleased with himself and prepared to be magnanimous.

"After all, you'll have to reveal it to his solicitor and it'll come out in court on Thursday," Miss Crindle said persuasively.

"He left a footprint," Plumley said in a slightly patronising tone. "He's a little fellow, as you know, and he takes size six shoes. The print was made by a size six trainer. We found trainers in his house. That's first. Second, one of the things taken was an expensive toy reindeer. Hopkins could never have afforded it, but he gave one to his kiddie a few days after the break-in. He claims he bought it in a pub here, but he can't describe the man he bought it from and the landlord and his wife say they haven't seen him lately and there hasn't been anybody selling toys in the pub."

"The Fox," Miss Crindle said briskly. "It's a nice pub." She saw Plumley's surprised look. "A friend and I have a snack lunch there sometimes when we're shopping," Miss Crindle explained. "There's no rock music blaring out so you can't think and it isn't too crowded. They do a very good ploughman's."

"Do they?" Plumley said weakly.

"They seem nice people there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They are. Very trustworthy."

"So you believe them. So would I." Miss Crindle nodded.

"Third," Plumley told her, "there was somebody else who could have done it."

"Oh!"

"But he seems to have an alibi and he hasn't been flogging toys."

"Oh," Miss Crindle said again, in a different tone.

It looked bad for Evan, she thought. Where had he really acquired Rudolph? A thought occurred to her, but she abandoned it immediately: Tom was a good six feet two and had big, clumsy feet. Moreover, she couldn't see him planning and carrying out such a burglary, even if he had been a thief. Kathy had seen that he kept to the straight and narrow since they were married.

"Did you know Hopkins has been put on short time?" Plumley asked. "They're buying that old council house of theirs and they're desperate for money."

Miss Crindle hadn't known, but her faith in Evan's innocence didn't waver. "How could he have known about the colonel's keeping all that money in the house?" she asked.

"People talk. Sometimes they don't realise what they're saying. Or what the consequences may be."

How true! Miss Crindle thought. She could just remember seeing, when she was a young girl, the wartime posters "Walls Have Ears" and "Careless Talk Costs Lives" and their wonderful Fougasse drawings. "Olive Hines is a splendid woman," she agreed, "but she does let her tongue run away with her sometimes. Oh dear."

Plumley began to understand Mr. Haddow's feelings.

"I imagine the other suspect was Vic Marshall," Miss Crindle went on. "He's a surly man, but I don't think he's a crook. Well, I mustn't take up any more of your time. Thank you for seeing me, sergeant."

She stood up and Plumley saw her out.

Miss Crindle made her way to the Abbey Tearooms, ordered a pot of Indian tea—she disliked China, which she regarded as insipid and unfit for robust tastes—and scones with jam and cream, and settled down to think.

Clearly the crux of the whole business was where Evan had obtained Rudolph. She accepted that he had lied about buying him in the Fox, but why? The obvious answer was, because he had stolen it. If he hadn't, it must surely mean that he was protecting some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body. And the only person he was likely to protect at the risk of going to gaol, with all that meant for his family, was Tom. The more she thought about it, the more convinced she became that that was the answer.

A thought struck her. "I wonder," she said aloud.

"Sorry?" the waitress said, returning with Miss Crindle's tea.

"Nothing. I'm sorry, I was thinking," Miss Crindle explained.

The waitress nodded understandingly. Her mum did that sometimes, talked aloud when she was thinking. Poor old thing. It must be awful to get old and go soft in the head.

Miss Crindle stirred the pot and waited a minute or two. When she judged the tea was brewed, she poured herself a cup and cut a scone in half before spreading it generously with strawberry jam and cream. It would help her think, she told herself. Anyway, surely at her age one had the right to indulge oneself in little ways occasionally?

She was convinced she was right. Not about the scone, but the other thing. She finished her tea rather more quickly than she would normally have done and returned to the police station.

Plumley was still there. She asked him two questions. To the first he replied, "No," and to the second, "I don't know," in a slightly bewildered tone.

"Is it possible for me to have a word with Evan Hopkins?" Miss Crindle asked him.

Plumley considered the request. He couldn't see it would do any harm, and he arranged for Evan to be brought to an interview room while he escorted Miss Crindle there.

"You've got yourself into a fine mess," she told the young man briskly. "I've promised Mary to see if there's anything I can do, and I want you to tell me one thing. Truthfully. You got Rudolph from Tom, didn't you?"

Evan looked at Plumley. "I told them, I bought it from a bloke in the Fox," he said.

"And we all know you didn't," Miss Crindle told him calmly. "Have you any idea what Mary and Lucy are going through, Evan? Doesn't that mean anything to you? I suppose it never occurred to you that you might be convicted and go to gaol?"

"They couldn't do that."

"Couldn't they?"

Their eyes met, and it was Evan who looked away first.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, I got it from Tom," he said. Fiercely he added, "Now you know. But he didn't break into the Hall. He wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Wouldn't he?" Miss Crindle asked.

When she and Plumley were back in the C.I.D. office, she asked if she might use the phone. The sergeant agreed, she looked up the number for Bontlas Hall and dialled it. Mrs. Routledge answered. Miss Crindle asked her a single question, thanked her, and replaced the phone.

"Evan didn't burgle the Hall," she told Plumley. "Nor did Tom."

"You mean it was Marshall?"

"No." Miss Crindle shook her head. "Your burglar was Kathy Hopkins, Tom's wife. When I asked you a little while ago if you'd asked the Routledges about people who used to work at the Hall, you said you hadn't, only if they had sacked anyone. I remembered that Kathy used to have a part-time job there until a year or so ago, and Mrs. Routledge confirmed it. Very likely Olive Hines told her about the money the colonel kept there one day when they were having their morning cup of tea.

"Kathy's average height for a woman, so I should think she takes size five or six shoes. And everybody under forty seems to wear those horrible trainers nowadays."

Plumley looked slightly stunned. "What made you think of her?" he wanted to know.

"Well, if Evan was lying about where he got Rudolph, he must have been protecting somebody. The only person he would go to those lengths to protect was Tom. But Tom couldn't be the burglar. So Evan must be protecting him from something else: like the consequences if Tom's wife was charged with the robbery. I expect Kathy told Tom some story about how she'd got the toys and asked him to sell them. He let Evan have Rudolph. Or she may have given it to Evan herself. He didn't know then where it had come from.

"I had Kathy at school. She was forever wanting things, and she wasn't always overscrupulous about how she got them. When I saw her in the village this morning, she was wearing a new coat. It looked expensive, and I wondered how she could afford it. Tom doesn't earn much, and she hasn't a job now." Miss Crindle paused. Then, smiling, she added, "Local knowledge is a great asset, sergeant."

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Miss Cwindle, Miss Cwindle! See, I've got a new Wudolph!" Lucy's eyes were bright and she looked as if she might burst with happiness.

Strangely, Mary seemed on the verge of tears. "I don't know what to say," she said.

"What about?" Miss Crindle asked.

"It was you cleared Evan, wasn't it? He came home this morning."

"I'm so glad. You'll all be together for Christmas then."

"And Wudolph," Lucy piped up.

Miss Crindle looked enquiringly at Mary.

"She couldn't have the other one," the girl explained. "The police said they needed it for evidence and, anyway, it belonged to the Routledges. But when that sergeant told Mrs. Routledge, she went and bought Lucy another one just like it. Aren't people great?"

"Yes. Yes, they are," Miss Crindle agreed. Mary was pretty great herself, if she could go on thinking that after what Kathy had done to her, she thought. "Yes," she said. "Yes, they are."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUMES NINETY-NINE AND ONE HUNDRED–1992

ADCOCK, THOMAS: My Dear Dead Dope	March	18
AKAGAWA, JIRO: Beat Your Neighbor Out of Doors	March	55
ALLYN, DOUG: Icewater Mansions	January	4
The Ten-Pound Parrott	February	92
Candles in the Rain	November	4
ANDERSON, ALICE: Bones	June	38
ARNDT, ELIZABETH FRAZE: Give Me a Clue	April	72
BANKIER, WILLIAM: The Perfect Victim	March	168
Death of a Noverint	April	86
Dewey Dies	June	26
Clay Lies Still	August	68
My Life as a Deadman	September	122
Out of the Ashes	December	140
BANNISTER, JO: The Witness	March	193
The Garden Party	April	121
A Poisoned Chalice	May	16
Howler	October	110
BARNARD, ROBERT: The Man in Her Life	February	58
A Sure-Fire Speculation	June	103
My Son, My Son	October	81
A Hotel in Bucharest	Mid-December	124
BAXT, GEORGE: Exotic Cuisine	December	14
BAYER, ANN: Account Settled	August	16
BEECHCROFT, WILLIAM: Turkey Durkin and the Catfish	October	228
BERLE, MILTON: Truck Stop	October	206
BISKIN, MIRIAM: A Spy by Any Other Name	February	118
BREEN, JON L.: The Jury Box	January–Mid-December	
Throw Out the First Ax	April	105
BROWN, ED: Expert Advice	January	68
BOSHINSKI, BLANCHE: Games	January	104
A Thieving Update	March	158
Sawed to Death	May	79
CAMERON, NEIL: On Viewing the Olivier Version of The Tragedy of Richard the Third for the Third Time	February	56
On Reading The Daughter of Time For the Third Time As Well	February	57
CAMPBELL, ROBERT: The Journeyer	May	138
This Church is Open	October	123
CARROLL, TED: Lineup	September	112
CASH-DOMINGO, LEA: The Disintegrating Man	June	128
CENEDELLA, ROBERT: Flies With Honey	April	77
CHESBRO, GEORGE C.: The White Bear	May	4
CHRISTIE, AGATHA: The Sunningdale Mystery	November	98
CICARELLI, RICHARD: Winning Numbers	April	100
COBB, M. E.: Strings Attached	March	259
COHEN, STANLEY: An Underworld Story	June	37
COVEY, BETTY E.: Mother Goose Mayhem: Little Jack Horner	December	75

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUMES NINETY-NINE AND ONE HUNDRED–1992

DARNOWSKY, SALLY: What Jimmy Saw	July	94
DAVIES, ROBERTSON: The Xerox in the Lost Room	Mid-December	71
DAVIS, DOROTHY B.: Parrots in My Garden	December	113
DEAN, DAVID: Angela's Baby	September	86
A Salesman's Tale	October	206
DELMAN, DAVID: The Conspiracy	November	82
DENEVI, MARCO: The Emperor of China	August	90
DE LA TORRE, LILLIAN: A Small Shadow	August	116
DEXTER, COLIN: Dead as a Dodo	December	4
DILLER, PHYLLIS: Takeout Dinner	January	100
Handyman	January	102
I Hate Aaron Cane	March	206
DINEEN, MARILYN: The Last Writes	May	118
DOMINICK, JANET BLAIR: Copy Cat	September	111
DUBOIS, BRENDAN: Grave on a Hill	October	31
ESTLEMAN, LOREN D.: Deadly Force	November	141
EQMM READERS AWARD (1991)	May	115
EQMM READERS AWARD BALLOT (1992)	Mid-December	83
FENN, LINDA PINCKNEY: High and Dry	March	126
FERRARS, ELIZABETH: Stop Thief!	November	34
FRANKE, ANITA J.: Hazardous to the Health	March	192
FRASER, ANTONIA: The Man Who Wiped the Smile Off Her Face	July	34
The Bottle Dungeon	September	136
FREMLIN, CELIA: Mother's Clever Idea	October	219
GREEN, CHRISTINE: Drummond Street	Mid-December	55
HAAF, BEVERLY T.: The Shoe	October	130
HALL, DAVID C.: He Who Waits for You	September	48
HAMILTON, NAN: Now You See It . . . Now You Don't	August	4
HEALD, TIM: A Winter Break	September	20
HEALY, JEREMIAH: Crossed Wires	March	260
Georgie Boy	July	4
HERSHMAN, MORRIS: Cloud of Smoke	March	42
Moving Target	August	30
HIDWELL, JEFFERSON: It Dezervd It!	September	120
HOCH, EDWARD D.: Five Days in a Texas Town	January	81
The Oblong Room	February	22
The Theft of the Barking Dog	March	97
The Spy and the Greek Enigma	April	56
Leopold's Class	May	121
The Eight French Dancers	June	72
The Detective's Wife	July	53
The Problem of the Vanishing Salesman	August	98
The Trail of the Golden Cross	September	55
The Iron Angel	October	88
The Summer of Our Discontent	November	51
The Problem of the Leather Man	December	40

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUMES NINETY-NINE AND ONE HUNDRED–1992

The Theft of Santa's Beard	Mid-December	30
HOLDING, JAMES: Another Grave Tone (Caesar Cook)	January	115
Another Grave Tone (Fred Dunlop)	March	225
Another Grave Tone (Carlton Kemper)	April	98
Another Grave Tone (Sonny Myers)	April	120
Another Grave Tone (Robert Sloan)	July	154
Another Grave Tone (David Stout)	September	134
HOWARD, CLARK: The Last High Mountain	February	125
IRELAN, PATRICK: Timekeeper	May	100
IRVINE, ANGIE: Feel the Power	January	70
Fathers	December	79
IRVINE, ROBERT: . . . And Sons	December	92
JAMES, L. F.: Jeffrey	June	110
JONES, SUZANNE: Birds, By Snow	August	58
JORDAN, DEANE: Making Change	October	138
KAPETANSKY, SEYMOUR: Who Was That Masked Man And How Did He Get Away With It?	June	127
Sore Loser	October	80
KEATING, H. R. F.: Scrabble Babble Dabble	February	4
The Crime of Arkady Nikolaivich	June	138
Just Only One Small Crime	September	82
KOENIG, JOSEPH: The Last Supper	September	113
KRULIKOWSKI, CLAIRE: Young Love	July	68
LAMONT, TIM: Bad Boy	February	85
LARSON, CHARLES: Sisters	June	59
LEWIN, MICHAEL Z.: The Truth	March	88
You Pay for Everything	December	104
LOVESEY, PETER: The Man Who Ate People	October	4
LYALL, FRANCIS: Confessional	November	124
LYNCH, MARIE: K-9 Cop	December	130
MACKAY, SCOTT: Pool of Discontent	March	159
The Grey-Mailing of Leonard Coombes	August	82
MARTIN, BRUCE: Revenge	November	139
MARTIN, CARL: Something Ventured	September	4
MAYBERRY, FLORENCE V.: Miz Sammy's Honor	June	42
The Stranger	November	110
The Secret	Mid-December	108
MCCLINTICK, MALCOLM: Your Word Against Mine	June	118
MCCRACKEN, BEATRICE S.: Love is Not All	May	137
MCINERNY, RALPH: Unfrozen Stiff	August	17
MEIER, LESLIE: Chocolate	October	144
MONFREDO, MIRIAM GRACE: Gather Not Thy Rose	July	42
MORTIMER, JOHN: Rumpole for the Prosecution	January	117
Rumpole and the Dear Departed	October	151
MULLINS, TERRY: Two Lengths Ahead of the Devil	February	43
The Threat to the Cathedral	March	181
When the Bell Was Silent	July	140

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUMES NINETY-NINE AND ONE HUNDRED–1992

MULLINS, TERRY *(cont.)*
Witch Hunt ... October 187
Topaz ... Mid-December 85
NAPARSTECK, MARTIN: The 9:13 ... February 68
NATSUKI, SHIZUKO: A Midnight Coincidence ... May 25
NEWLAND, EMILY: Stop, Thief (Robber, Crook)! ... August 40
OATES, JOYCE CAROL: Schroeder's Stepfather ... April 4
The Model ... October 244
OLSON, DONALD: Somewither Cold and Strange ... March 249
Period of Mourning ... October 30
Shutterbug ... December 131
Deadly Wednesday ... Mid-December 20
OPPENHEIMER, JUNE: Justice ... July 31
O'TOOLE, JOHN M.: Masquerade ... October 177
OWENS, BARBARA: Mercy's Killing ... January 45
Dead Ringers ... March 113
Best Friends ... August 132
Teeny Ann ... Mid-December 47
PETERS, ELLIS: A Light on the Road to Woodstock ... April 132
The Trinity Cat ... Mid-December 4
PEYER, DON: Rocky Knew ... October 149
POLLACK, DOROTHY BELLE: Such Things Will Happen ... July 67
POWELL, JAMES: Dark Possessions ... February 34
Unquiet Graves ... June 14
The King of the Orangutans ... September 100
Ruby Laughter, Tears of Pearl ... Mid-December 98
PRONZINI, BILL: Liar's Dice ... November 132
RESNICOW, HERBERT: Dog Act ... August 42
ROBERTS, GILLIAN: One Beautiful Body ... December 25
ROSEN, MILT: The Eyewitness ... May 74
ROWLANDS, BETTY: The Killer Instinct ... March 152
Here Comes a Chopper ... May 56
RUSSELL, E. S.: Last Bite ... April 48
Blind Justice ... September 69
RUSSELL, LEE K.: Ma Goose's Crib Rhymes #1040: unearned income ... August 50
SAYLOR, STEVEN: A Will is a Way ... March 130
Death Wears a Mask ... July 101
The Lemures ... October 52
SCOTT, JEFFRY: Too Good to Live ... January 32
Money in the Bank ... March 32
A Helping Hand ... April 24
Curse of the Irish King ... September 31
SEAGO, KATE: I Never Forget a Face ... December 38
Something Fishy ... Mid-December 123
SLESAR, HENRY: A Letter Too Late ... July 127

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUMES NINETY-NINE AND ONE HUNDRED–1992

SMITH, MARY D.: Lament for a Legend: Lizzie Borden Revisited	August	123
SMITH, WILLIAM F.: Powered Sugar	Mid-December	17
SPEYERER, JAY: Class Act	May	89
SPRAGUE, GRETCHEN: Can You Hear Me?	August	92
STUART, IAN: Jimmy My Son	December	122
Miss Crindle and the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Mid-December	139
SUTER, JOHN F.: The Touch of a Vanished Hand	March	26
Erasing Footprints	August	51
SWEENEY, STEPHEN J.: The Coup	January	98
THOMSON, JUNE: Secrets	March	4
Cliffscape With Figures	August	146
THURBER, JAMES: Mr. Preble Gets Rid of His Wife	September	151
TREAT, LAWRENCE: Incident in Hell's Kitchen	May	108
The Brothers	July	84
TRUITT, MARIE E.: No Noose is Good Noose	September	85
UTLEY, STEVEN: The Dinosaur Season	March	209
VACHSS, ANDREW: Born Bad	June	4
VAN DE WETERING, JANWILLEM: Heron Island	January	60
VERDE, TOM: The Big Dance	April	39
VICKERS, ROY: Blind Man's Bluff	March	226
WALLACE, PENELOPE: Truth to Tell	November	75
WALSH, JACKIE: The Lavender Garden	August	128
WASYLYK, STEPHEN: A Pint of Revenge	July	69
WHITEHEAD, J. W.: The White Mansion	June	93
WHITTED, DIXIE J.: Stick-Shafted	March	112
To the Parole Board	March	167
Plea-Sing Bargain	September	135
Foregone Collusion	October	226
Debt Blow	December	139
WILLIAMS, DAVID: Take Two Husbands	December	60
WINGATE, ANNE: Burglar Burgled	February	20
I, Claudius Revisited	April	130
Account Settled	August	16
YATES, DONALD A.: Written Mousetraps	November	109
ZIEGLER, BOB: Fame at Last	May	107

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEXT ISSUE...

13 stories—including

Three-ten to Yuma by ELMORE LEONARD
Accommodation Vacant by CELIA FREMLIN
Secrets Can Be Dangerous to Your Health by GEORGE BAXT
Rink Rat No More by WILLIAM BANKIER

JANET HUTCHINGS ..... *Editor*
TARA ANN CUDDIHY ..... *Assistant Editor*
JEAN TRAINA ..... *Design Director*
TERRI CZECZKO ..... *Art Director*
ANTHONY BARI ..... *Junior Designer*
MARILYN ROBERTS ..... *Senior Production Manager*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Manager*
CYNTHIA MANSON ..... *Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights*
CONSTANCE SCARBOROUGH ..... *Contracts Manager*
BARBARA PARROTT ... *Director of Newsstand Circulation*
BRUCE SCHWARTZ ..... *Director of Circulation Subscription Sales*
DENNIS JONES ..... *Operations Manager Subscription Sales*
DAVID MENDELSON ... *Renewal & Billing Manager Subscription Sales*
FRED SABLOFF ..... *Advertising Director*
JUDY DORMAN ..... *Advertising/Classified Advertising Coordinator*

ADVERTISING OFFICES

NEW YORK
(212) 856-6306

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE
Dresner Direct, Inc., N.Y., N.Y. (212) 889-1078

CHRISTOPH HAAS-HEYE
President and Publisher
Dell Magazines

JACK HOEFT
President and CEO
Bantam Doubleday Dell

* * *

ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief
(1941–1982)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN
Editor-in-Chief
(1982–1991)

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Vol. 100, No. 8, Whole No. 607, Mid-December 1992. Published every 28 days which includes special issues in March and October by Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.25 a copy in the U.S.A., $2.95 in Canada. 1 year subscription $31.97 in U.S.A. and possessions, $37.50 elsewhere, payable in advance and in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10168. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to Ellery Queen, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third-class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1992 Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1215 Walker Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y 2N9. ISSN: 1054-8122. Dell GST: R123054108. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

EQ MID-DECEMBER 92

ELLERY QUEEN—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $3.65 per word—payable in advance—($54.75 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to Judy Dorman, DELL MAGAZINES, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10168-0035.

ADDITONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! $100 per book. Send name, address to: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-337), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

AUTHORS' SERVICES

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK NOW! Your book can be published and promoted by the leading subsidy book publisher. Send for free booklet HP-5. Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

Bargain Books

Save up to 80% on publisher's overstocks, imports, remainders. Choose from up to 8,000 titles including 600-1,500 new arrivals each month! **Mystery,** Biography, History, Fiction, Politics, Literature, Nature, Gardening – something for everyone. Fast shipment, moneyback guarantee. Write for **FREE CATALOG**

Hamilton Box 15-792, Falls Village, CT 06031

MYSTERY CATALOGS Nelson Frelic 8 Second Story Books 12160 Parklawn Drive, Rockville, MD 20852.

FREE LIST! Used mystery, detective and thriller fiction. Marshall Snow, 292 Providence Rd., So. Grafton, MA 01560.

FREE Catalog. Used hardbound and paperback mystery fiction. Books West, Box 417760, Sacramento, CA 95841.

BOOK & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

SAVE UP TO 80% on publisher's overstocks, imports, remainders. Choose from up to 8,000 titles including 600-1,500 new arrivals each month! **Mystery,** Biography, History, Fiction, Politics, Literature, Nature, Gardening—something for everyone. Fast shipment, moneyback guarantee. Write for **FREE CATALOG, Hamilton** Box 15-792, Falls Village, CT 06031

FREE PAPERBACK COUPON. Used mystery and detective fiction. Free Catalog. NO Tie Required, Box 9592, Cedar Rapids, IA 52409.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperback, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE Catalogue of used & collectable detective fiction. Dunn & Powell Books, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

ANNOTATED lists of new mysteries. Also used mystery catalog. Rue Morgue, 946 Pearl, Boulder, CO 80302. Order any in-print mystery: 1-800-356-5586.

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED, all types. Company with 70-year tradition. "Authors Guide to Subsidy Publishing." 1-800-695-9599.

MYSTERY ADDICTS! Free catalogue! New and Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters Box 32192-C, Cincinnati, OH 45232, 513-242-7527.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

BOOK & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

ATHEIST books, booklets, greeting cards, and products for the heretical. Over 120 titles. American Atheist Press, Dept. #CM, P.O. Box 14505, Austin, TX 78761-4505. Complete catalog $1.

FREE Hardback Mystery Booklist, Ted Bailey Mystery Bookseller 2420 McCullough #302, San Antonio, TX 78212.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! *Free Supplies. Postage! Bonuses!* Start immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-RDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-0015.

IT'S NO MYSTERY! Using Zip Codes in your ad assures more responses! AND, when replying to an ad, make sure your request is properly addressed.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets. Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, New Bern, NC 28563.

INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTORS! Your first step is important. For FREE advice, call ADVANCED PATENT SERVICES, Washington, *DC. 1-800-458-0352.*

Free kit for inventors! Call the Concept Network. *Patenting *Research *Marketing. 1-8009-835-2246. Ext. 197.

MAILING LISTS

ACTIVE NEW "HOTLINE" NAMES! GUARANTEED! FAST DELIVERY! MIXED STATES! 200/$20; 500/$35; 1000/$55. Dealers's Co-Op, Box 526-I, Griffith, IN 46319. 1-800-992-9405.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Prosessing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start Immediately! Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCR, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-0015.

IT'S NO MYSTERY! Using Zip Codes in your ad assures more responses! AND, when replying to an ad, make sure your request is properly addressed.

MAIL letters for Pay! $100-$700 Weekly! Send Three First Class Stamps: Blumes, Box 5938, Richardson, TX 75083.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

GOOD SINGLES with Christian values!! Local/Nationwide introductions! FREE magazine! Rush age, interest. Amber, Box 232, Deer Park, NY 11729.

TRADITIONAL ORIENTAL WIVES! Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Since 1984. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

FREE photos! Meet pretty Mexican ladies. World, Box 7358-DD, Moreno Valley, CAS 92552. Call 1-800-643-7309.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship, romance & marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! ALL ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE INTRODUCTION AGENCY, (Dept. D/P), 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, ENGLAND. TEL: 01144-843-290735.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP, MARRIAGE. American-Mexican-Oriental. Free Photos. Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista CA 91912 (619) 425-1716.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

EQ MID-DECEMBER 92

PERSONAL-Cont'd

"MYSTERY Lovers' Correspondence Bureau" - Meet other mystery lovers through the mail - Send Sase to: MLCB, P.O. Box 223, Warwick, N.Y. 10990-0223.

BEAUTIFUL ASIAN LADIES seeking friendship, romance. Photos, FREE. New Horizon Introductions, Dept. G, Box 97, Tecumeseh, MI 49286.

SONGWRITERS

$1,200.00 CASH PRIZE. Poems Wanted For New Songs - Recordings - Publishing. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 34278.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

RECIPES

AWARD WINNING CLAM CHOWDER RECIPES includes: Authentic New England, Vintage Manhattan, and Indian Clear. Send $2.00, Sase, R. Gagne, Box 29081, Providence, RI 02908.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

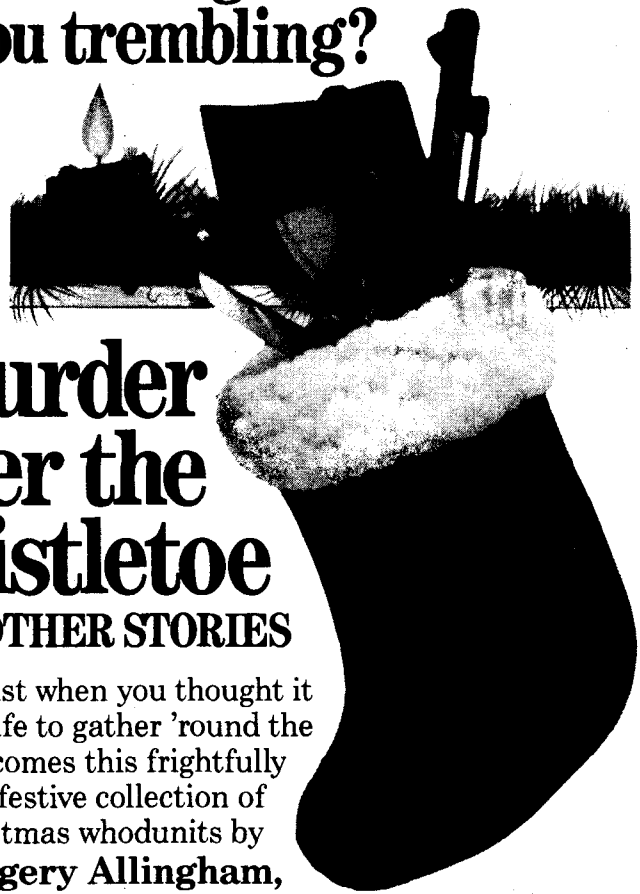
Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to Judy Dorman
Dell Magazines, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slay bells ring... are you trembling?



Murder Under the Mistletoe

AND OTHER STORIES

Just when you thought it was safe to gather 'round the Yule log comes this frightfully festive collection of Christmas whodunits by

Margery Allingham,
John Mortimer,
Peter Lovesey, Julian Symons,
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,

and 10 more masters of mystery. So this Christmas season, deck your shelves with mystery, mayhem...and *Murder Under the Mistletoe.*

$4.99 SIGNET
Penguin USA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY WAREHOUSE SALE!

Join us in our first anthology warehouse sale with great savings! For only $12.95 (includes postage and handling), you will receive five classic Ellery Queen anthologies. Our warehouse is packed with anthologies that will provide you with hours of great reading. Act quickly...this sale is for a limited time.

Please send your name and address with your check or money order for $12.95 to:

Ellery Queen
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, NJ 07462

MNNQ-3

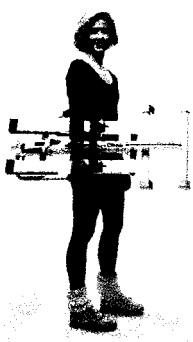
While we cannot accommodate requests for specific anthologies, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment.

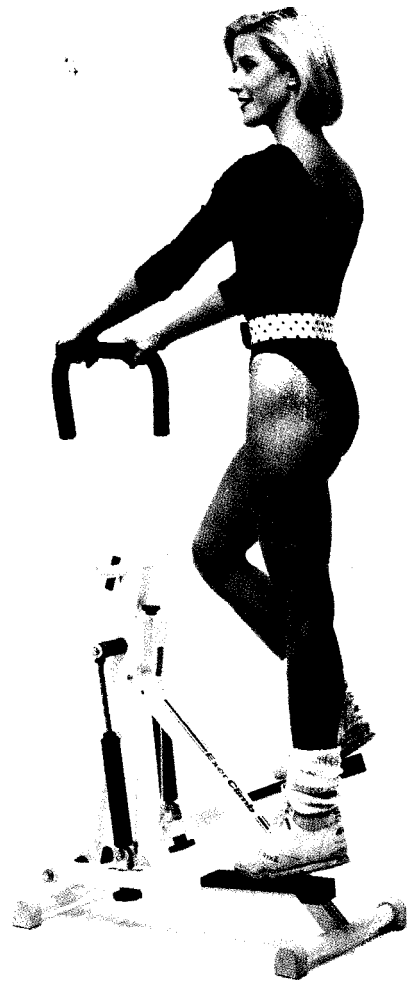
Available only in the US and Canada. Canadian orders please add $4.00 (US funds only). Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ STEP UP TO A HEALTHIER YOU

Doctors, physical trainers, and athletes agree that stair climbing is one of the best forms of aerobic exercise. You can achieve your fitness goals without the severe jarring or pounding associated with running or jogging. That's why the foldaway ExerClimb™ is the perfect piece of exercise equipment. The ExerClimb™ improves cardiovascular function, increases endurance, burns body fat, and conditions major muscle groups to tighten and tone upper body, thighs, hips, buttocks, and calves. And results can be seen with a twenty minute workout three times a week. It is quiet enough to let you exercise while watching T.V. or listening to your favorite music. The hydraulic powered ExerClimb™ features sturdy steel construction, magnum series shocks and individual tension adjustment to insure a high intensity, low impact workout. Compact and lightweight (28 lbs.) this incredible machine fits in virtually any size room. When opened for use, it measures 28"H x 27"L x 16"W. Plus, its unique fold-away feature makes carrying and storage a snap. Perfect to take along to your office, trips, or almost anywhere. Some assembly required, using only screwdriver and pliers. For all these great features, one would expect to pay much more, but the ExerClimb™ has a very trim price tag. So now there is no reason not to "step" into better shape. Ninety day warranty. **$119.98** ($15.00) #A1998.





TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL** DEPT.132 EL; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-722-9999**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard, Visa, and American Express. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. **30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund.**

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1991

1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED